# THE MARRIAGE of THEODORA

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL

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# THE MARRIAGE OF THEODORA

"It was Theodora's fixed intention to charm Lord Fermor at that moment"

(page 313)

# The Marriage of Theodora

*By* MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL

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To the dear memory

of

Henrietta

*"And sweetly, from the far-off years*
*Comes borne the laughter, faint and low,*
*The voices of the long ago—*
*My eyes are wet with tender tears."*

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## CHAPTER I

### A Modern Englishman

The rosy dusk of a June evening lay upon great London town. The trees in Hyde Park loomed large in the soft, still twilight, and the Serpentine, dark and quiet, reflected the stars that stole into the purple sky. The noises of traffic had ceased, and the laughter, the lights, and the gaiety of the evening had not yet begun. Nearly every house in the wide and spacious Queen's Gate was illuminated. The balconies and windows were masses of pink and white blooms, whose delicate odour made the summer night fragrant.

Three great houses, in a row, however, showed no signs of festivity. On the drawing-room balcony of the middle one, Castlemaine House, Lady Susan Battle, tall, broad and oracular, was laying down the law and the prophets to her brother, the Earl of Castlemaine, and the heir presumptive, Lord Fermor.

"I protest," cried Lady Susan wrathfully, arranging her satin draperies of a violent red, "the next thing I expect to hear is that some American has taken Buckingham Palace for the season and converted Westminster Abbey into his private chapel. What do you think that good-looking, painted Jezebel, Flora Bellenden, told me to-day?

That this man Seymour, who lives next door, had taken King's Lyndon on a seven-years' lease. I told her she didn't know what she was talking about but nothing can abash that woman."

At the mention of Mrs. Bellenden's name, Lord Castlemaine gave Lord Fermor a significant half-glance which, however, discovered nothing. Fermor, the perfect type of a slim, sinewy, high-caste Englishman, did not so much as wink an eyelash at the mention of the lady's name, which he might be supposed to defend from the charge of being a painted Jezebel.

Lady Susan, having mounted her hobby, which was detestation of Americans, proceeded to lash it, and spur it. Lord Castlemaine listened with a grin. He was not without sympathy for the Lady Susan Battles of England. It was a grievous thing that with hordes of unmarried girls in England, and a scant supply of men, the Americans should cull the best of the crop of husbands. Lord Castlemaine, himself, admired American women æsthetically, and preferred shamelessly to have an American sit next him at dinner. But he had no especial fancy for the splendid uncertainties of an American heiress' fortune. It was invariably too well secured to the wife, and the husband sharing it depended too much upon his good behaviour. Nevertheless, Lord Castlemaine was willing to proclaim an entirely different set of sentiments, for the pleasure of harassing Lady Susan. Fermor listened to the conversation

abstractedly; he was not much interested in Americans.

The father and son were singularly alike in spite of the gap of thirty years between them. Lord Castlemaine carried his sixty-five years with courage. He had lived hard, gambled hard, drank and dined much and often, and, what was more, had worked hard. He was endowed with great wit and great passions and he used the one to gratify the other. One of his strongest passions was for the House of Lords. He would leave Newmarket at any moment when there was a field night on in the Upper House. And he had been known to abandon Monte Carlo, in the height of the season, to make a series of fierce assaults upon Gladstone's ministry. Lord Castlemaine was by nature a Tory, but, unlike most Tories, he had no expectation of revolutions turning backward, and fought the advancing hosts of the great Demos, with his back to the wall. He might, however, be classed with the destructive rather than the constructive statesmen. He had never held office and professed a disdain for it. As a matter of fact, his bitterness of tongue, his brilliant invective, his appalling and dangerous candour, his pitiless logic, made him more feared as an ally than as an opponent. He was still slim, if not sinewy, but the strenuous life had left its mark upon him. In his youth he had been thought to resemble the young hero, his head looked as if he had picked it up on a battle field. Fermor, at thirty-five,

had the appearance of clean living and the reputation of something else.

It was Lord Castlemaine's habit to listen with delight to his sister Lady Susan's vapourings and to encourage her in perpetual scheming for things which never came to pass. At forty-five, Lady Susan had married Joshua Battle, a small, meek and amazingly rich man, from Birmingham. Lady Susan's quarterings made up for the fact that Joshua Battle had begun life as an ironmonger on a large scale, and his money atoned for his having five maiden daughters, when he married Lady Susan. It became the dream of Lady Susan, who was a good step-mother after her lights, to marry one of the Battle girls to her nephew, Lord Fermor. She had tried him with Jane, Eliza and Sarah Battle, but had failed signally with each. There were two others still in the hands of governesses and masters, and Lady Susan, undaunted by her three previous defeats, confidently reckoned that either Rebecca or Amelia would be the future Countess of Castlemaine.

Meanwhile, Lord Fermor showed no inclination to marry anybody, and as Mrs. Bellenden, the lady described by Lady Susan as the "good-looking, painted Jezebel," was already provided with a husband, there could be no question of his marrying her, for the present at least. Fermor must marry money; that was well understood. Castlemaine was a poor earldom, as earldoms go, with a big town house and two great country places, which cost a

fortune to keep up and consequently were allowed to go down. King's Lyndon, the finest of these places, lay in one of the beautiful midland counties of England, and had been practically closed for ten years. The repairs and refurnishings would have swamped Lord Castlemaine completely, and so it had gone untenanted, except for an occasional month or two when Lord Castlemaine or Fermor would occupy three or four rooms in a corner of one wing of the vast house. Lord Castlemaine was an open and confessed Londoner, unashamed and unafraid. He was the soul-brother of Macaulay and Dr. Johnson and those men to whom the great surging city thundered a perpetual message. No matter how much King's Lyndon and Longstaffe might go to rack and ruin, Castlemaine House was always kept up to the mark, and its dinners were still good in spite of the fact that like everything else Lord Castlemaine possessed, it was covered with mortgages, to which Fermor had calmly, if not cheerfully, agreed. To-night there was no dinner on at Castlemaine House; Lord Castlemaine and Fermor were both dining out and Lady Susan had stepped in for her daily visitation to her brother and nephew. Finding that Fermor did not pick up the gage of battle cast at his feet by the mention of Mrs. Bellenden's name, Lady Susan proceeded to take her grievance to walk as the French say.

"The Americans simply own London during the season. Everywhere you go they are there—those

little women with their insignificant features and their ridiculous little white shoes, and their heads held up in the most impertinent manner, eyeing their betters. If I had brought up Mr. Battle's daughters to be so bold in their air and carriage I should consider that I had been most deficient in my duties as a step-mother."

"The American women have indeed a most uncommon carriage of the head and a quite indescribable courage in their eyes. God knows, none of your girls have it," responded Lord Castlemaine.

"Look," continued Lady Susan, pointing an indignant finger at a strip of red carpet spread from the door of the next house across the sidewalk, "I daresay that American now, Seymour, and his daughter next door, are expecting royalty this very evening. The way the King runs about to those American houses is simply disgraceful."

That no such honour was intended for the American neighbours, was now made plain by the appearance of a handsome empty brougham at the door. Lord Fermor, who had an eye for a horse, leaned over the balcony with its masses of pale pink hydrangeas, and noticed the clean-limbed, perfectly matched chestnuts, who stood motionless like bronze horses before the strip of red carpet.

"Remarkably correct," said Lord Castlemaine, his eye glancing over the whole equipage.

At that moment the door of the great mansion opened and a lady appeared and walked down the

red carpet to the carriage, where the footman held the door open. She was of medium height, but very slender with a figure of a girl of twenty moulded into an exquisitely fitting white bodice. A filmy billowy train like a cloud floated behind her, and from her skirts peeped, not the small white shoes, abhorred by Lady Battle, but an aggravation of the offence—little shoes of cloth of silver, embroidered in pearls. The evening was warm and around her shoulders was only a thin white scarf. The grace of movement, the slight figure, the gentle haughtiness of the upraised, bare, dark head, fixed the attention of Fermor. He had the consciousness of having before seen that face with all its elusive charm, but he could not recall when or where.

When the lady reached the carriage door, she turned and waved her hand to an elderly gentleman standing on the balcony of the house. Her face was clearly visible. It was finely finished with delicate eyebrows, dark eyelashes over darker eyes and thin red lips. She was not a girl—so much was plain—although there was about her the characteristic girlishness of the American type. Her age hovered somewhere about thirty; she had reached a period that was like the veiled brilliance of a summer noon, when it is neither morning nor evening, but which has the glow of the morning and the melancholy sweetness of the evening. It was difficult to say whether she was beautiful or not, but she radiated charm. So much was this the case that

Lady Susan was beginning another diatribe against Americans, when it was cut short by the arrival of Lord Castlemaine's brougham, to take him to dinner at the Prime Minister's.

The elderly gentleman still lingered in full view on the balcony of the next house. He was as distinctively an American as Lord Castlemaine and Fermor were Englishmen. His air, grave and suave, his small and slightly stooping figure were not suggestive of the American plutocrat, but rather of a man who had suffered some hard blows from the iron hand of destiny.

Fermor rose and went down the broad imposing stairs with Lord Castlemaine.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will give me a lift as far as Chester Street, where I am dining. We can save the estate one cab fare anyhow."

Once inside the brougham Lord Castlemaine, turning full on Fermor, said suddenly:

"The estate is in rather better case to-day than it was last week. I saw Stratton this morning and he says that the whole matter of King's Lyndon was settled yesterday by Seymour, the American, in half an hour. He went down, looked over the place, came back, and offers to take it on a seven-years' lease with the privilege of buying within six months, paying the whole sixty thousand pounds in cash. That will clean Longstaffe and the town house and leave a balance, and by the blessing of God I shall spend next season at Monte Carlo, like

a gentleman, which I have not been able to do for the past five years. I have no sentiment about King's Lyndon or any other place, thank God."

Fermor remained silent, his sombre grey eyes fixed before him. He had a sentiment about King's Lyndon. There he was born, and there were clustered the few faint recollections of his mother, a pale, silent, devoted creature, who had faded out of life as quietly as she had passed through it. He had been a boy of twenty-three in the Guards when he had agreed to join in cutting the entail. Now twelve years afterward, when he knew what he was doing, he was called upon to take the consequences. The sale of the place would very much diminish his interest in the county, for Fermor had inherited his father's passion for public life. He had always meant to make it his career, but many things, including lack of money and Flora Bellenden, had prevented. Of late, however, a silent change, a wordless revolution, had been going on within him. Perhaps it was because Mrs. Bellenden had reached the stage when she dyed her hair and wrote him incessant and insistent notes—a phase which is inevitable in the Flora Bellendens of this world.

According to logic and general usage Fermor should have hated his father, but he did not. In many respects they were alike, with equal gifts. Fermor was the better balanced of the two, and he had been born in a better age—for the mid-Victorian age was only a trifling improvement, in mor-

als and manners, on the early Victorian period which inherited a frightful legacy of corruption from the Georgian era.

Lord Castlemaine had a few intermittent impulses of generosity and affection; Fermor had a heart. One of these rare impulses of generosity seized upon Lord Castlemaine. He glanced at Fermor and observed that he was no longer young; there were fine lines around his eyes and his hair was growing thin on the temples. So far he had been balked of the wish of his heart, to enter Parliament, and that too for want of money.

"I said there would be a balance left over if the place is sold, as Stratton considers certain, and I think it only fair that you should have a reasonable sum for your expenses if you wish to stand for the House. From what the doctors say about old Whitby there will be a vacancy pretty soon in the division."

Fermor, surprised and touched, turned to Lord Castlemaine and said:

"Thank you."

It was not much, after all; but it was more than he expected. It moved both of them so much that, like true-born Britons, they scurried away from the subject by mutual consent.

"How do you suppose the story leaked out about the lease of King's Lyndon?" asked Fermor.

"Through a woman, of course. They have a devilish ingenuity for finding out and betraying secrets.

That is to say, all the sex except your Aunt Susan. Her mind leaks like a sieve, but she couldn't find out anything to save her life. She has not yet discovered that none of Joshua Battle's daughters will ever become Countess of Castlemaine. Nevertheless, my boy, you have got to marry money."

Fermor smiled grimly at this, but made no reply.

"But not an American," continued Lord Castlemaine energetically. "With that ridiculous American daughter-worship, the American father keeps a tight rein on his daughter's money and expects everything he gives her to be used for her sole benefit."

"Perhaps Birmingham would be better, after all," answered Fermor, laughing.

And soon they had reached Chester Street, the brougham pulled up and Lord Fermor got out. Lord Castlemaine gave no indication that he knew Fermor was going to Mrs. Bellenden's house to dinner. He had large tolerance in such matters, requiring much indulgence himself, but, like all men of his kind, although he condoned the lapses of his fellowman toward women, he never thought the particular woman in the game worth the candle.

## CHAPTER II

### Theodora

There was a big dinner on at the Prime Minister's, and when Lord Castlemaine entered the first of the three great drawing-rooms it seemed quite full of persons. He was among the last arrivals and the hostess immediately began apportioning the ladies to the gentlemen who were to take them down to dinner. Lord Castlemaine, on whom was bestowed a dowager duchess, caught the sound of a name behind him, Madame Fontarini, whom Marsac, one of the secretaries of the French Embassy, was invited to hand down. Madame Fontarini proved to be the lady of the white gown and silver shoes.

Lord Castlemaine had a photographic mind, and while listening with a grin to the duchess's artless prattle as they moved down the splendid staircase, he was rapidly assembling enough facts to identify Madame Fontarini. It was one of the best names in Roman society, belonging to the "Black" section. There was a Cardinal Fontarini who had a nephew, Pietro, a scamp of the first water, and said to be the handsomest young man in Rome. Ten or twelve years before this Pietro married a young American girl with a great fortune. The possession of money had made Pietro Fontarini a worse

man than ever before, and after a stormy career, of a few years, which narrowly verged on crime, he had died of his excesses. Lord Castlemaine never remembered to have heard the name of Fontarini's wife mentioned since her husband's death, but he thought the chances were that this Madame Fontarini was the lady in question. He was rather pleased when he found his left-hand neighbour at the long and glittering table to be Madame Fontarini.

Lord Castlemaine was a connoisseur in feminine beauty, as well as in horses, although no woman could acquire an ascendency over him any more than could the finest steed of Araby. One comprehensive glance at Madame Fontarini showed that she could stand the closest inspection. If the director of the Grand Opera at Paris had studied how to show her off to the greatest advantage he could not have chosen better. All the women present were of the large high-coloured type, dressed chiefly in heavy satins and velvets, and blazing with jewels which added splendour to the *mise en scene* of the noble apartment, the magnificent dinner-table radiant with lights and flowers and the servants in gorgeous liveries of maroon and gold. Madame Fontarini was by no means the handsomest woman present, but unquestionably the most distinguished in appearance. With her dark hair, white skin, and delicately cut features she looked like a cameo in an exhibition of terra-cotta busts. Her filmy white gown, with its billows of lace, made the

other women look as if they were upholstered. Nothing sparkled upon her gown or in her hair, but around her slender throat was an antique pearl necklace. This absence of jewels gave the effect of disdaining rivalry and calmly assuming superiority. Her dark hair, in which there were a few silver threads, was dressed as simply as a wood nymph's, whose only mirror is the fountain of the forest. The hair of the other women was dressed most elaborately and gave Lord Castlemaine the impression that they had bought their heads out of a hairdresser's window.

Before he had finished his soup he began a conversation with Madame Fontarini. Circumstances favoured him, for the duchess was frankly afraid of him and openly preferred the ambassador on the other side.

"I think we are neighbours," said Lord Castlemaine.

"Yes," responded Madame Fontarini, turning upon him her large, clear, dark gaze, "I have known you by sight ever since we took our London house," then she added, smiling, "and also by name. You are Lord Castlemaine."

"And you are Madame Fontarini," said Lord Castlemaine. "I knew a cardinal of that name while in Rome years ago."

"He was my husband's uncle," replied Madame Fontarini. She spoke quietly enough, but there was an expression upon her mobile face and a note in

her voice which gave warning that the subject was not to be pursued.

"I always liked the Romans, but I own I never could understand them," continued Lord Castlemaine, shying away from the personal note.

"No one can, except a Roman," answered Madame Fontarini quietly. "I spent six years of my married life in Italy. I knew the Italians little in the beginning; I knew them still less in the end."

"The modern Italians, you mean. We all know the old fellows who harangued in the Capitol, and sought office worse than a Liberal ironmonger with a pot of money." Lord Castlemaine had in mind his brother-in-law, Joshua Battle, who had visions of being a Lord of the Admiralty or possibly Postmaster-general and who was egged on by Lady Susan. "And the generals who took good care that their campaigns in Gaul and Africa should be known to the Senators."

"And the Romans of the Middle Ages," said Madame Fontarini. "I think they had not learned so much of artifice as the Italians of to-day."

"Oh, my dear lady, yes they had. Machiavelli says, you know, that the French always beat the Italians in war and then the Italians beat the French in diplomacy."

"Perhaps it is because I am an American that I understand Romans so little, nor any of the Italians, for that matter," was Madame Fontarini's response.

"You know they are very diverse, just as the Frenchmen of the North differ from the Frenchmen of the South, and the Parisian is a type by himself."

"I see you know Europe well. You are among the Americans who pay us the compliment of preferring to live among us."

"Pray acquit me of the bad taste of preferring any other country to my own," replied Madame Fontarini, softly smiling, but decisive. "My father's affairs have made it necessary for many years past that he should live abroad. We are established in England for the rest of our lives, as far as we can now see, and we hope and expect to like it, but we do not belong to the class of voluntarily expatriated Americans. It is my father's particular quarrel with Fate that he cannot live in America, but we have determined to make the best of our enforced residence in England."

Lord Castlemaine opened his eyes at this. He never remembered hearing the same sentiments from any of the numerous Americans who had great town and country houses in England. Madame Fontarini's air of gentle courtesy robbed the words of anything like impertinence, but it tickled Lord Castlemaine that she should speak of a residence in England as a sacrifice which she was prepared to make gracefully.

Then her neighbour, Marsac, claimed her attention. He was a handsome, vivacious Frenchman, who had made his way by wit and good sense from

the ranks of working journalists in Paris, to be secretary of the Embassy at London. He was evidently charmed with Madame Fontarini, and her smiles and soft laughter showed that she was not insensible to his brilliant attractions. It was a quarter of an hour before Lord Castlemaine had an opportunity to strike into the conversation again. Marsac and Madame Fontarini were discussing country life in England, and Madame Fontarini turned to Lord Castlemaine.

"It is all changed," he said; "country life in England was the finest thing in the world when the late Queen was snubbing Sir Robert Peel, and people waited for good weather to cross the Channel. Then the great houses were occupied all the year round, except for two months during the season. Now the more great houses there are in a given locality the worse off it is for society. Half the people are off yachting, or on the Continent, or in America or South Africa. The other half depend upon London to furnish them with guests for week-end parties. For my part I fly in the face of all tradition and say London is the place, after all."

"Yes," put in Marsac, "London is England, but all of you have not yet waked up to the fact."

"I have," replied Lord Castlemaine, laughing. "London is the only place in England where men are found in appreciable numbers."

"I have noticed no lack of them," said Madame Fontarini.

"Of course not," answered Lord Castlemaine gallantly, "'Where the bee sucks,' etc., but I predict you will like the town better than the country in the end."

"Pray," said Marsac, "do not disparage country life to Madame Fontarini, who has been telling me of the pleasure she expects in the country house which her father, Mr. Seymour, has leased. I was just begging her for an invitation to visit her as soon as she is established as chatelaine."

Madame Fontarini remained silent; the allusion was somewhat awkward, as she knew Lord Castlemaine to be the owner of King's Lyndon, but that unabashed person responded at once:

"Yes, Mr. Seymour has done me the favour to lease a place of mine, King's Lyndon. I wish him joy of it," he added, smiling to Madame Fontarini, "and in particular, I don't wish, in case the place is given up, that it shall be restored to me in exactly the condition in which I let him have it."

The duchess then claimed Lord Castlemaine's attention, desiring to know what kind of soil he thought best adapted to developing the colour of hydrangeas. Lord Castlemaine, who did not know a hydrangea from a turnip, gravely advanced an opinion that a light soil heavily imbued with phosphates would cause a hydrangea to grow blue. He talked so learnedly on the subject that the duchess, as usual, suspected him to be laughing in his sleeve, a suspicion which became a conviction when Lord

Castlemaine assured her of his passion for attending flower shows.

In the midst of it, Lord Castlemaine caught a ripple of laughter from Madame Fontarini. Marsac was telling her some of his escapades in Paris, when he and his friend, Fontaine, played the famous trick of an imaginary uncle Maurice, who turned out to be a real person. Lord Castlemaine glanced at Madame Fontarini, whose style was distinctively *il penseroso*. Her eyes were sparkling, and an elusive dimple showed in her pale cheek. She was like a fountain in the heart of the forest, on which the sunshine suddenly strikes, turning its shadowed beauty into a glory of laughing brightness. Lord Castlemaine was surprised at himself for turning so frequently toward her. He often found American women amusing, but not always interesting in the highest degree, and she was slightly different from any American woman that he had so far met. He wondered if she had the characteristic American humour, and presently, satisfied himself that she had.

Marsac, who was a brilliant talker, continued to absorb so much of Madame Fontarini's attention that Lord Castlemaine, at sixty-five years of age, felt himself chagrined for the first time in forty years that another man had beaten him out in the good graces of a charming woman at dinner.

Meanwhile, Fermor's adventures were quite different from Lord Castlemaine's. He had arrived

in Chester Street ten minutes in advance of the time, and strolled down a side street where he could not be seen from Mrs. Bellenden's window. He had experienced a great deal of that unauthorised henpecking which women like Mrs. Bellenden fall into invariably. She would be certain, if she saw him, to reproach him bitterly for neglecting the opportunity of a ten-minute *tête-à-tête* with her, as well as for other neglected opportunities. So Fermor determined that she should not see him, if he could help it. As he walked around the square, he saw in advance of him, another man, like himself marking time before dinner. It was Ashburton, his best, and, Fermor thought sometimes, his only friend. Ashburton had exchanged into a line regiment, alleging that he could not afford the Guards, as his mother and sisters had but a scanty income. Fermor reckoned this conduct on Ashburton's part to be one of heroic virtue and ever afterward felt himself honoured by Ashburton's friendship. During a long service in India, Ashburton had kept up an intermittent correspondence with Fermor. Then suddenly Ashburton inherited a considerable fortune. His mother was dead, his sisters married, and he resigned from the army. He kept modest chambers in London, frequented the "Rag," and did nothing so far as Fermor knew in the way of spending his money.

Flora Bellenden had contrived to meet Ashburton by a cleverly arranged accident, but in spite of her most determined efforts Ashburton declined to call

in Chester Street. He went out occasionally in society, a silent, plain man, who bestowed his attention chiefly on elderly dowagers and neglected spinsters. Fermor often wondered what Ashburton did with his time, his money, and himself. As the two men caught sight of each other at the same moment, Ashburton pulled out his watch.

"Twenty-two minutes past," he said; "we have eight minutes more."

"I can stand the delay," said Fermor.

He was in a very bad humour and not averse to showing it. Ashburton grinned. He could put two and two together, and as in his heart he loved Fermor, he was glad to observe that Mrs. Bellenden was growing to be an almost intolerable bore to him. They talked a moment or two, walking together, then they came to a wall with an iron gate in it. Through the iron bars they could see a small garden, and the open glass doors revealed a large, plain room with two or three men in clerical dress seated about it reading or writing.

"Look," said Ashburton to Fermor, "those are the men who live, after all. They are the priests of a Catholic parish around here. It is a poor parish, I believe, the parishioners being generally servants and small shopkeepers. These men rise at five o'clock, dine at one, and the day's work is over for them at seven. I know them all. That short, grey-haired one was a chaplain in my regiment in India. He broke down and came home, and he now thinks he

is in Paradise, with a parish of his own and a roof over his head and a hundred pounds a year. He is the man I envy and would wish to imitate."

Fermor was surprised. There were times when even the most reserved of men feel the need of confidence, and that hour seemed to have come for Ashburton. It was as if he were looking for someone to whom he should open his heart when this brief, accidental meeting with Fermor occurred; and with Fermor it was the same. He, too, had one of those rare moments of expansion, but there was now no time for confidences.

"Will you be going to the reception at Petersham House to-night?" Ashburton asked Fermor.

"Yes, if you are there we can walk back together. Like you, I fancy the quiet streets at night."

Then Fermor turned away and in three minutes more was bowing over Mrs. Bellenden's hand in her drawing-room.

She was very tall and fair and had been the beauty of her season, and might have been a beauty still but for the obvious artificiality of her gold-coloured hair, her pencilled eyebrows and the touch of rouge upon her cheeks; all of which are things that cannot be concealed. Her manner was dramatic, just as her appearance was spectacular, and she was slightly in advance of the age in every respect. She motored, shot, rode, did everything with an intensity which befitted her rôle of a beautiful, desperate and neglected wife. Bellenden, a handsome,

stupid country gentleman of modest fortune, who was completely dislocated by being transplanted to London, loved his wife, shut his eyes to her conduct, obeyed her implicitly and was mortally afraid of her. To Fermor, Mrs. Bellenden assumed to have lived a life of domestic bliss with Bellenden until Fermor crossed her orbit. As a matter of fact Fermor was the fourth or fifth man whom Flora Bellenden had beguiled. The others had broken away from her in time. She held on tenaciously to Fermor, her first youth being past, and he, being more of a gentleman at heart than the other men, had refrained from throwing her off. She bitterly resented having been married to Bellenden in her first season, believing that she could have married a duke if only she had been properly jockeyed.

In default of that she meant to be, if possible, the next Countess of Castlemaine. Not that Fermor had ever said so much. He was not wholly bad, nor wholly good, but he respected his name and he respected also a faint shadowy memory of his mother. There was a time in the beginning when Flora Bellenden's beauty bewitched him and when he believed the stories she told him with dramatic force of the injuries she suffered at Bellenden's hands. These were long since exploded and Fermor felt a kind of grotesque sympathy with the unlucky Tom Bellenden.

Nothing is more difficult than for a man, with a show of decency, to rid himself of a woman like

Flora Bellenden. It was in vain that Fermor showed her the door; she would not go out. Actually, Flora Bellenden was as much in love with Fermor as a woman of her kind can be in love with a man. She admired his long, graceful body, his agreeable voice, the little touch of coolness about him in all he said and did. He interested her and piqued her; and infuriated her, and without him she was bored. Above all, he could make her some day Countess of Castlemaine, provided a divorce could be arranged between Tom Bellenden and herself. But on this point Fermor maintained a grim silence. He was not credited with many scruples, but he had a scruple, backed by an adamantine prejudice, against marrying a divorced woman.

For more than two years past a deep and silent resentment had been steadily growing in his mind against Mrs. Bellenden. The sophistries were melting away and he saw her as she was. But that did not make it any easier for him to refuse her invitations, avoid her, and, in short, to be rid of her. He had reached that point when any strong influence brought to bear upon him would have made him break with Flora Bellenden. So far there had been no such influence, except his own disillusionment. That was now complete.

Another fact was fixed. He hated divorces and the divorced. For this, he could give no particular explanation any more than he could for the unvarying force of gravitation. But it had grown and de-

veloped in him, first from the determination not to make Flora Bellenden his wife until he reached the point of resolving never to marry a divorced woman.

As he took his hostess down to dinner, followed by half a dozen other couples, and watched her preside at her own table, he thought he had never seen a woman with less personal dignity. The dinner was bad, and Mrs. Bellenden lost her temper with the soup and did not recover it until the dessert appeared. Poor Tom Bellenden, patient and shamefaced, bore it all with a kind of stupid dignity.

When dinner was over Fermor reckoned upon slipping out and getting off to Petersham House, leaving an excuse for his hostess. The Fates, however, would not have it so. Mrs. Bellenden was going to Petersham House too, and having intimated so much, her guests left early and she appeared in the smoking-room, where Fermor and Bellenden sat smoking. There was an assumption of friendship between the two men to which honest, stupid Tom Bellenden hung on tenaciously.

"Will you be going to Petersham House?" Mrs. Bellenden asked of Fermor. "Of course it will be a bore to Tom and he will be glad enough if you can take me in a hansom."

"Oh, no, it won't be a bore," said Bellenden suddenly, "I'll take you, Flora."

"And drag me home within half an hour."

"I will stay as long as you like."

Mrs. Bellenden glanced from her husband to Fer-

mor and back, with vexation in her heart. Fermor's look was unmistakably one of relief.

"Then I won't detain you," he said, rising. "I have got to look in for half an hour and I shall see you there. Meanwhile, *au revoir*."

Once out in the street Fermor swore at himself with heart and soul. The time had come when he could stand no more of Flora Bellenden. She bored him, she annoyed him, she humiliated him. He had been to blame too, but, looking the matter in the face, he saw that interest and a sordid ambition were at the bottom of all that Flora Bellenden professed for him. He had been as lavish of money to her as he could; indeed, there was a kind of virtue in the way he had denied himself, in order that this harpy of a woman could not at least call him mean. She had wrested from him more than money—she had contaminated his life, balked his honest ambitions and made him, at thirty-five, a mere pawn upon the chess-board. But it should be so no longer. These thoughts were bitter, but in them was a kind of elation which comes from a strong purpose resolutely embraced. Henceforth, he was a free man. He would go into public life, he would take up the responsibilities of his position, and he would live uprightly.

## CHAPTER III

### Regeneration

Fermor's head was full of these thoughts when he came to the door of Petersham House. It was splendidly illuminated and the great staircase was blocked with half London in gala dress. In the midst of the crowd, the lights, the gorgeousness, the thought that he had broken his chains was still in Fermor's mind, and gave a new animation to his somewhat cold and impassive face. He reached his hostess, paid her the compliments of the evening, and then made his way through the crowded rooms, speaking to acquaintances right and left. He noticed how blooming many of the girls looked with that rose-like English freshness; he had enough of painted women. He experienced a strange, new feeling almost like happiness. The people about him, who in general had no interest for him, suddenly grew interesting. He saw, or thought he saw, in them, minds at ease, energies well directed, good relations between man and man; between man and woman. The sense of freedom became a dumb exhilaration. He was self-contained, but not cold, and, like most human beings who can think, he could also feel.

Mrs. Bellenden, he knew, had arrived, and in com-

mon decency he must speak to her sometime during the evening. An hour passed, however, before he began to look for her. Then he caught sight of her tall figure at the farther end of the three superb drawing-rooms. He felt no unwillingness at going to her, because he was sure that in some way he could make his new resolve known to her, and believed by her. When he had got within a few feet of her, he noticed standing, close by, the lady of the white gown and silver shoes, whom he had seen get into the carriage earlier in the evening. She was in front of an open window, her graceful head and delicate contours outlined against the dark foliage of a tree that was almost pushing its way into the opening. Again Fermor had the feeling of reminiscence, of a vague, unplaced memory of her. As at the dinner, Madame Fontarini's surroundings accentuated her soft and pensive beauty. She was speaking with Marsac and his wife, an agreeable Frenchwoman, and her air was exquisitely gracious. From Madame Fontarini, Fermor glanced toward Mrs. Bellenden. Never had Flora Bellenden looked so artificial, so wholly demoralised, as at this moment. She was engaged in a running fire of rather pronounced conversation with two or three men who were laughing at her bold sallies. She wore an air of triumph as she saw Fermor, as much as to say:

"See, I can keep men around me."

Fermor, with a bow and smile, that implied

"You are too much engaged for me to intrude myself," turned and spoke to Marsac and Madame Marsac. They were very cordial and Fermor found himself in the same group with his next-door neighbour.

At her first words he perceived that she was an American. Her accent, although perfectly correct, had the subtle, transatlantic difference. So had her conversation. The group talked together for a few minutes, closely watched by Mrs. Bellenden. Seeing that Fermor was in no hurry to come to her, she dismissed her court and walked up to him. She knew Marsac, as she knew everybody in London, and to him she immediately began:

"You have treated me shamefully of late. You have not once been to me on Sunday, and I am thinking of cutting you out of my motoring party to Richmond next week."

Marsac, who was the embodiment of gentlemanly impudence, replied smiling:

"Thanks, Mrs. Bellenden, but I did not know that I was in your motoring party."

Instantly a kind of chill fell upon the group, which had been talking so pleasantly before. Madame Fontarini moved off, shaking hands with Madame Marsac, whom she asked to luncheon with her the next week, and bowing gracefully to Marsac and Fermor. Marsac, as if to emphasise his snub to Mrs. Bellenden, asked plaintively of Madame Fontarini:

"Do you mean to ask my wife to luncheon and leave me out? I feel sure it is an unintentional omission."

Madame Fontarini shook her head with smiling resolution.

"You are too brilliant and entertaining," she said; "when you are present Madame Marsac and I do nothing but listen to you, and forget all that we intended to say to each other. No, I shall not let you come to luncheon Tuesday."

Mrs. Bellenden advanced a step and attempted to engage Marsac in conversation. She liked to be seen talking with him, as he was reckoned one of the great wits of the diplomatic corps. But Marsac, with perfectly well-bred diplomacy, slipped off, after having given her a parting shot, which might be delicate trifling, or else scathing impertinence. Mrs. Bellenden chose to take it as the latter.

Anger generally turns women into fools, and this was the case with Mrs. Bellenden at that moment.

"I think," she said to Fermor, "under the circumstances, that I have a right to ask you to show Marsac he cannot address me in that manner with impunity."

Mrs. Bellenden had spoken in low tones and Fermor and herself were far enough apart from the rest of the throng not to be overheard. Nevertheless, instinctively they moved toward the conservatory at the farthest end of the room. Fermor, having taken his resolution, was glad of an opportunity to put it into execution. The man in him

rose and overpowered the gentleman. Looking Mrs. Bellenden in the eye, he replied suavely:

"I shall do no such thing."

The blood poured into Flora Bellenden's face under the rouge upon her cheeks.

"Do you mean——" she stammered.

"Exactly what I say," answered Fermor.

There was a pause, and the other persons in the room, glancing toward the two, saw that Mrs. Bellenden was red and Fermor pale.

"Will you come to me to-morrow morning?" she asked hurriedly.

"Certainly," said Fermor, "and for the last time."

Then, by mutual consent, they turned back toward the groups of persons standing about the well-filled rooms.

The man and the woman had reached the parting of the ways, and the moment had come, with a shock, suddenly, and at the most inappropriate of times. The elemental passions are all unmannerly and take no heed of man's convenience, or woman's, either.

One person present had observed, and understood, the whole scene between Fermor and Mrs. Bellenden, which seemed a mere casual conversation. This was Lord Castlemaine, who said to himself for the hundredth time:

"Fermor will have a reckoning yet with Mrs. Bellenden. God forgives and men forget, but women never do either."

There was a fourth hand, the devil, in the complication with Bellenden and his wife and Lord Fermor, for in the perilous game of progressive passion the devil is on hand at the beginning, the middle and the end.

Then Fermor, saying good-by to those about him, including Mrs. Bellenden, went out of the room, passing his father. There was a laughing devil in Lord Castlemaine's eye which reinforced Fermor's resolution, already strong, to break for ever with Flora Bellenden. He had made a fool of himself for the last time about her, or any other woman. He longed to get out of the crowded and heated rooms, into the chill, fresh air of the night, and to have the companionship of a man like Ashburton, single-minded and simple-hearted. He caught sight of Ashburton in the drawing-room and signalled to him, and the two men left at the same time.

The night was sharp, for June, and they struck off at a rapid gait through the quiet streets. Neither man spoke, although each was in the mood to make and receive confidences. Presently they found themselves walking past the locked gates of the Park, through which could be discerned the black masses of the trees, and the wide expanse of grass upon which a silvery moon threw dappled shadows. A cool night wind was blowing up the river from the salt seas. It rustled the tree-tops, which whispered anxiously among themselves, in the cool, mysterious night.

"Come, my boy," said Ashburton, "you are going too fast for me. Let's halt a while."

Fermor stood still and looked meditatively down upon the ground, his hands in his pockets. It was long after midnight, every house in sight was dark, and except the occasional rolling of a belated cab or carriage, there was no sound to break the silence of the streets.

"I did not know I was racing," he said; "the truth is I feel a sense of relief, of escape, that a man naturally takes out in walking. I am a free man, Ashburton, free from this night forward."

No name passed between them, but Ashburton understood in a flash what Fermor meant. To make sure, however, he asked deliberately:

"Free to marry, do you mean?"

"Yes," replied Fermor, "not that I am thinking of it; far from it. But I am free to do it now, the first time in ten years. I have given up the Capuan delights. I have other matters on hand. There will probably be a bye-election in Midlandshire within a month, and I shall stand for the seat. You know my desire has always been to go into public life, but I had not the money, or had other uses for it. Now the chance has come, after ten of my best years are gone."

"Yours is only the average loss in a man's life," replied Ashburton; "mine is much greater. I knew very well what to do with my life when I had a small allowance and a mother and sisters who needed help.

Then, all at once, a lot of money came to me, and those who had just claims on me no longer needed help. I think I was free-handed enough, but I was not such a fool as to begin the wholesale demoralisation of all the young men in my family, by handing them out money. I tried to help them judiciously. I don't think any of my gifts hurt them. But then came the great question—after doing for others, what to do for myself? I am not an idealist, like you, but a practical man, a soldier, a man strongly addicted to order and discipline. When I wake up in the morning at seven o'clock, I wish to know what I shall do at nine, twelve, six, that day. I like to execute orders in detail."

"It is that spirit which fills the Trappist monasteries with ex-military men," replied Fermor with a smile, looking at Ashburton's strong, homely face, which the keen and piercing expression redeemed from commonplaceness.

"I felt myself a part of the great machinery of the universe. I know that idea has been expressed grandly and poetically, before. I don't trouble myself about the universe, it is this England of ours, this town of London, that concerns me. I wish to be doing something here under orders from a superior, not from a board of managers—I never believed in councils of war. When things have got to that pass that the commanding general does not know what is best to do it is time to put another man in his place. A month ago I met the man I showed

you this evening—Brown, who had been a chaplain in my regiment. Good working name, that of Brown. I made him talk about himself. I swear to you, Fermor, I long to change places with Brown. But, see the good sense of the whole system. They choose their recruits just as we choose ours in the army. I was too old. I did not have the spirit of a postulant. I did not wish to learn, but to do."

Ashburton's ordinary face was lighted up, not so much with enthusiasm as with resolution. His voice grew tense like a man describing conditions to a subordinate. Fermor listened intently. He, himself, wished to be, more than to do, but he understood Ashburton's next words.

"I wish to do, not to be. It is said of Christ that He went about doing good, not merely being good. This being good is a matter of great uncertainty to everybody, including the individual man himself. I found I could join the Third Order of St. Francis and yet remain in the world, for I am no ascetic, no dreamer, not the man to dig in a monastery garden. I like my club, I wish to live like a gentleman, though without extravagance, and to put me in a cassock would be to turn me into a hypocrite. A fortnight ago I made my resolve and went and told Brown, a practical fellow and not given to talk, about it. I don't think altogether we have spoken ten minutes upon the subject, but I am now a member of the Third Order of St. Francis and I have something to do, and I do it."

"What is it?" asked Fermor, deeply interested. "The idealist, you know, must give us something practical and the practical man must give us something ideal."

"I found something practical immediately. A couple of poor devils at Aldershot got in a drunken row and gave a publican a blow, from which he died. I went down, by Brown's orders, and saw those men in the military prison. At first they both protested their innocence, which was a lie, and I knew it. Before I left one had broken down—what do I say? He had risen up to the full stature of a man and said to me, 'I did it, sir, my pal had nothing to do with it.' And the other fellow, not to be outdone in generosity, proposed to lie like a horse, when the trial came on, in order to save his comrade."

Ashburton gave a short laugh. The form which self-sacrifice took in the trooper's primitive mind was amusing enough.

"After that success I began to wonder whether I could speak to you, Fermor, about things in your life, which needed mending. I talked with Brown about it and he said 'No' flatfooted. He accused me of having the zeal of a convert, which made me swear at him. But see—you have spoken to me. You have broken away from the things that held you back."

"But it was not from any impulse of goodness," replied Fermor. "I am sick of the whole business."

"Never mind, you have broken away. There is daylight ahead for you."

Without saying another word they resumed their walk together. Fifteen minutes brought them to the open space of Queen's Gate. Ashburton, with a brief "Good-night" turned into one of the small side streets, while Fermor went on to where the great houses stood dark and massive in the night of black shadows and white moonlight. He felt a powerful influence at work within him. Ashburton, he had always liked and respected, and the simple and practical nature of the man made him a good guide. It was as if in starting upon a difficult and hazardous journey, he had found a travelling companion upon whom he could rely.

Fermor let himself into the great dark house and made his way to the smoking-room in the back. There he found Lord Castlemaine. It was an unwelcome jar in his present mood. Lord Castlemaine was the farthest man on earth removed from Ashburton.

Lord Castlemaine had been trained in the school of selfishness formed by the law of primogeniture. It was remarkable that so much of generosity remained in him that he would occasionally, as in the matter of Fermor's election expenses, deprive himself of anything whatever. He did not, however, regret his promise in this instance, but it rather inspired him with the wish to do something more for Fermor.

Lord Castlemaine, stretched out on the broad leather lounge, was watching the blue wreaths of smoke from a strong cigar. Fermor, sitting in a great arm chair, trifled with a cigarette. Lord Castlemaine, whose eye was always seeking to be pleased, looked at his heir with approval. Fermor could not be described as handsome—Lord Castlemaine hated what is called beauty in a man—but Fermor was thorough-bred, with all the marks of race upon him. This reflection gave Lord Castlemaine the opening he desired.

"I am thinking," he said, "of starting a missionary society to show women how to make the best of their beauty and the least of their ugliness. This fashion of dyed hair among women is enough to drive any man into voluntary celibacy like St. Paul."

Fermor said nothing, but lighted another cigarette.

"You know how one of the American comic journals described the modern woman, 'A woman of sixty, who looks fifty; who thinks she is forty; dresses like she is thirty; and acts like she is twenty.' This exactly describes one-half the women I saw to-night."

"Most Americans are amusing," said Fermor, thinking this a safe and general proposition.

"I sat next one to-night at dinner who could not be called amusing, but who was most interesting. Oddly enough she turned out to be the daughter of

Seymour, who lives in the next house, and who in God's good time, I hope, will become the purchaser of King's Lyndon. She is the lady whom we saw get into the carriage this evening."

Fermor recalled her with faint interest, his mind being on other things.

"She is a Madame Fontarini. Did you ever hear, in Rome, of that Pietro Fontarini, nephew of the Cardinal, and who was known as a bad hat from the beginning?"

"Yes," answered Fermor, "I recollect now, the last time I was in Rome, six or seven years ago, hearing of a frightful thing about Pietro Fontarini, and I also now recall that his wife was an American. There was a boy, an only child, about five years old. One day during Madame Fontarini's absence Fontarini took the child out and was gone several hours. The weather was bad and when the little fellow came back he had a violent chill and died within a week. It turned out that Fontarini had him driving for several hours, up and down the Pincio, in an open carriage with Sacco the dancer, and himself. That was too much for Roman society, and Fontarini was *declassé* after that."

"I recall it all now," added Lord Castlemaine. "Pietro Fontarini was hissed in the theatre, and Sacco was obliged to leave Rome. Fontarini's uncle, the Cardinal, cut him dead in public, and directed his servant not to let Pietro Fontarini in the house."

Suddenly it came back to Fermor where he had seen Madame Fontarini. He remembered the golden spring afternoons of that year when, in the Borghese Gardens, he had often seen the Cardinal, a stately old man, walking with a young women draped in black, or sitting with her upon a stone bench in the sunshine. Sometimes, the girl, for she was little more than that, would throw aside her heavy black veil, and her face, pale, grief-stricken and abstracted, was the face of Madame Fontarini, whom Fermor had seen that night with all the charm of gala dress. But in her dark eyes and upon her sensitive mouth were the traces of the bygone tragedy.

Lord Castlemaine went on speaking:

"Fontarini luckily is dead, and it seems a pity he was ever born. Madame Fontarini has evidently returned to her father, and appears to be an only child. She has a great deal of charm and dignity. It occurred to me, to-night, she would make an admirable Countess of Castlemaine."

"For yourself? Let me know the date and I will cheerfully do the handsome thing and will be best man."

"Oh, Lord, no! I was thinking of you!"

"But I have often heard you declare that American heiresses were a very risky investment."

"So they are—so they are—as a general rule, but this woman has been married before. Seymour expects, so his daughter told me to-night, to live in England, and, of course, if his daughter marries

again he will have to make a settlement on the good old British plan—the man to be rewarded for his sacrifice."

"All you say," said Fermor, laughing and rising, "would apply equally well in your own case."

"Possibly, but I am acting the part of a paternal pelican toward you. At all events, I shall cultivate the father, as well as the daughter, and if I meet Seymour, I shall ask him to call. Madame Fontarini was by long odds the best dressed woman at the dinner."

"I admit, as regards clothes, the American women generally leave the daughters of Albion at the starting post."

"This one was more than well dressed. She had about her the note of personal distinction, and she was not hung all over with gew-gaws, like an Indian begum. Well, good-night. Let me know tomorrow morning whether you are inclined to enter the running with Madame Fontarini."

Lord Castlemaine went out of the room. Fermor, left alone, sat down again and began to smoke and to think. Hope welled up in his heart, although he had before him that hateful half hour next day. He was sure of himself in any event but one. If Flora Bellenden should weep—he never could resist a woman's tears. He had never seen her weep, and he did not think she could. Anything else, reproaches, taunts, appeals, he could withstand. It might end by Tom Bellenden putting a bullet

through his head or through Fermor's heart, for Bellenden was a primitive man, and if he chose to see, there was no reckoning upon what he might do. He had not seen, and suspicion in his mind, dominated by his wife, had never taken shape. One of the worst things about the whole business, to Fermor, was Bellenden's confidence in him, a confidence at once pathetic, grotesque and lethargic. The thought of that nerved Fermor even against Flora Bellenden's tears, if she should shed any.

Then, as a relief from the painful anticipations of the next day, Fermor turned his mind upon Madame Fontarini. There indeed had been a tragedy. It had often occurred to him that periods in the lives of human beings came to an end, were closed like books and laid away upon the shelf never to be reopened again. The first volume of Madame Fontarini's life had the simple, direct and inevitable tragedy of Greek drama. Now it was done with and the next volume might be all delight and joy.

And Ashburton—he, too, was beginning a new volume rather late in life, for he would never see forty again. Fermor determined to look up in the encyclopedia exactly what the Third Order of St. Francis might mean. It was something good, and full of consequence, or Ashburton would never have troubled himself about it. With these reveries Fermor staved off more unpleasant ones, until he went off to bed, at three o'clock in the morning. Thoughts of the morrow kept him wakeful.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Breaking from Bondage

The clock was striking eleven next morning when Fermor entered Mrs. Bellenden's drawing-room. The day was dull and cold, for the season, and the light was grey in the Chester Street drawing-room. Flora Bellenden was waiting for him, and Fermor was forced to admit that she had, or should have had, great and striking beauty. She was taller than most women, but perfectly lithe and graceful. Her gown was sumptuous and becoming, and her effects would have been good except that she studied them too much. As Fermor was announced she rose, and he could not but admire the stateliness of her figure and bearing.

No woman deliberately enters upon such a scene as lay before Mrs. Bellenden without looking carefully to her ammunition. Flora Bellenden's ammunition was of a worthless sort, for she was made up more artfully, and consequently more odiously, than common. She greeted Fermor with her usual familiarity, calling him "Reginald." Fermor used the Englishman's ordinary and invincible weapon, silence, and waited for Mrs. Bellenden to speak.

"We had an unlucky tiff last night," she said, trying to smile and giving Fermor a look which Vol-

taire describes as the "long, reproachful, haggard glance of a jealous woman," "but I suppose we are both of us ready to make up again this morning."

"That was not my understanding of it," replied Fermor coldly.

"I will admit I was in the wrong," presently said Mrs. Bellenden.

There was a long pause. Fermor had given her a chance to dismiss him, but her last speech showed that she had no intention of doing so.

"There is no division of right or wrong," he said in reply; "we have both been in the wrong. I am willing to take my share of the blame—but the end has come."

No woman ever hears, unmoved, these words from a man; rage, shame and despair are usually her portion then. Flora Bellenden felt rage and despair, but suffered no pang of shame. She rose and took a seat near to Fermor.

"I know I have often been tiresome," she said softly. "I know my temper is trying, but think what I have to bear! My husband——"

Fermor stood up. "Let us not speak of him," he said; "it ill becomes us to do so. Whenever I am in that man's presence or under his roof I feel myself to be a scoundrel. It is not a particularly pleasant feeling, hence I have concluded to be a scoundrel no longer."

He had meant to say something courteous and

even chivalrous then, but she gave him no chance. She poured forth reproaches, threats and taunts, walking excitedly up and down the floor. Nothing she said could force a word from Fermor. After ten minutes of this he went up to her, and drawing from his pocket a great, glittering diamond ornament, put it in her hand.

"This is a parting gift," he said.

These were not the words which he had pondered over on his way to Chester Street. In parting from a woman a man desires to say something regretful to maintain the old tradition of being dismissed, but all of Fermor's soft words deserted him. His native honesty seemed to rise up and throttle him, and keep him from uttering the falsehoods a gentleman is expected to tell in such circumstances.

If Flora Bellenden had showed indignation at the gift, if she had felt herself insulted by its offer, if she had shed tears, Fermor's ruin might not have been averted then, but she took the ornament readily enough, while making a ridiculous feint of not wanting it. Nor did she shed a single tear. Thus did fortune look kindly upon Lord Fermor.

"Good-bye," he said, "I beg you will always consider me as a friend, but I can never come here again."

There was a finality in his tone which convinced even Flora Bellenden. The interview had lasted barely fifteen minutes. This then was the parting after ten years. The wound to Mrs. Bellenden's

vanity was very great, and it also meant the wreck of many ambitions, but in the midst of this tumult of soul, the streak of barbarism and of childishness, which dwells in women like herself, made her glance furtively and with satisfaction at the diamond ornament. It must have cost at least five hundred pounds, a large sum for a man in Fermor's position.

"The time may come, perhaps, when you will regret having deserted me," she said after a moment; "you will at least shake hands with me."

She offered Fermor her free hand and he took it and made as if he would kiss it, then dropped it suddenly, with a strange expression of repulsion on his face. The next moment the door had closed after him.

Mrs. Bellenden stood motionless until she heard the street door shut. Fermor was indeed gone. At once her mind leaped to the conclusion that there was another woman in the case. The thought threw her into an agony of anger and a passion for revenge. Through it, nevertheless, her eyes remained fixed upon the dazzling ornament in her hand. A new difficulty occurred to her; how was she to account for having an ornament so splendid, and without accounting for it she dare not wear it. She held it up to the light, watching the diamonds flashing and burning, and suddenly her husband stood at her elbow. His florid, handsome face had in it a kind of dull suspicion. He had not heard

voices in the drawing-room, nor did he know that Fermor had come and gone.

"What do you think of this?" asked Mrs. Bellenden, coolly, handing the ornament to her husband. "Is it not a wonderful imitation?"

Bellenden glanced at the glittering thing. He knew nothing of jewels and was ready and willing to believe anything his wife might tell him on that or any other subject.

"Some fellows at the club last night were saying it was hardly worth while for women to wear genuine jewels now-a-days, the imitations are too good," he replied.

"Yes. The pearls, you know, have to be weighed to tell the sham from the real. This thing is ten pounds. I can exchange it if I like. I thought I would show it to you and Fermor and a few others, and ask what you thought of it before I decided to keep it."

"I hate shams," replied Bellenden, "but I am not such a fool as to meddle with my wife's taste in dress."

"I think I shall keep it," said Mrs. Bellenden. She had spoken all through with perfect composure, a composure which had saved her in many tight places before.

Bellenden was going to ride in the Park, and his wife, as a good strategic move, offered to ride with him. It was the first time in years that she had done such a thing, and poor Tom accepted it gratefully.

Half an hour afterwards they were cantering together along the Lady's Mile. The morning had suddenly brightened and the sun was shining, and the Park was full of that smart crowd which fills the green chairs on sunny mornings and afternoons during the season. Among the loungers in the green chairs were a number of men and women who laughed at the spectacle of Flora Bellenden riding with her own husband. Lord Castlemaine was on foot. He liked his morning stroll in the Park as much as Dr. Johnson loved his walk down the Strand. The afternoon was the time for riding, Lord Castlemaine declared, when the carriages were full and the beauty show was on.

Never had Lord Castlemaine seen more animation in the space between Queen's Gate and Apsley House, than on this June morning. All smart London seemed to be there. It was almost as good as the London of Lord Castlemaine's youth, as described in Disraeli's novels, only the scenes of one's youth are always better than the scenes of one's old age. At every turn Lord Castlemaine met acquaintances who congratulated him on his looks, for no man in London carried sixty-five years better than he. A monocle was still good enough for him, and his keen eyes travelled over the crowd, scarcely missing a face. Bellenden and his wife riding together did not escape Lord Castlemaine. Mrs. Bellenden looked remarkably well on horseback and her secret agitation gave her more animation than usual. Still

Lord Castlemaine's inward comment did not vary. Why did a fellow as clever as Fermor allow himself to be hauled and pulled about by a hussy like Flora Bellenden? He forgot, after the manner of men, that he had been hauled and pulled about a good deal in his time by ladies not unlike Mrs. Bellenden.

As Bellenden and his wife passed out of view, Lord Castlemaine caught sight of a lady and gentleman sitting on a bench together, near Albert Gate. They were his neighbours, Madame Fontarini and her father, Seymour. Madame Fontarini looked as well in the morning as in the evening. She was in a white toilette of the crisp, fresh, fine, delicate and expensive sort which is a unique possession of the American woman, and her white gloves, shoes, hat and parasol shouted out her nationality. She looked younger, more girlish than the night before. Lord Castlemaine at once made his way toward her and greeted her in his most charming manner.

"And this, I believe, is Mr. Seymour," he said, offering his hand to Seymour. "I think we may claim acquaintanceship through our friend Stratton."

Seymour shook hands courteously and Lord Castlemaine, without waiting for an invitation, seated himself on the other side of Madame Fontarini. He began talking to her in his most brilliant and amusing style. Seymour listened gravely with an occasional smile. As Madame Fontarini was quite

different from the usual type of Anglicised Americans, so was Seymour slightly different from any American Lord Castlemaine had yet seen, among the class who have town houses and big places in the country. He was a gentleman, obviously, without having about him the marks of race, the air of the highest breeding, which distinguished his daughter. His hair and moustache and peaked imperial were quite white, and he gave the impression of a man prematurely aged. The expression of his light blue eyes was beautiful and peculiar. It was the look of modesty, of deprecation, of gentle humility, of the deepest kindliness, an expression rare in men and women, but sometimes seen in the eyes of children. Seymour's manner corresponded with his looks; it was quiet, retiring and shrinking. The first glance revealed that Madame Fontarini was an idolised daughter. The relations between them seemed curiously reversed. It was Madame Fontarini, whose attitude was one of tender protection, of affectionate consideration. She frequently turned to her father and addressed him with gentle respect. He replied in kind, but briefly and without contributing much to the conversation.

Lord Castlemaine understood perfectly well, from Madame Fontarini's presence that night before at the Premier's dinner, that she had access to the best society in London.

The name of Fontarini would give her that. He led the conversation, artfully, upon the Italian

Ambassador, and was not surprised when Madame Fontarini replied coolly that she had no acquaintance with the Ambassador, as she had never called at the Embassy.

Lord Castlemaine had been talking with his newfound acquaintance quite half an hour, when he caught sight of Fermor, walking briskly past.

"May I introduce my son, Lord Fermor?" he asked of Madame Fontarini, and without waiting for permission, beckoned to Fermor, who advanced and was introduced. Theodora Fontarini was familiar enough with the English customs to know that this was a proceeding quite out of the ordinary. But so was Lord Castlemaine out of the ordinary, and Fermor also.

The proceeding, which would have flurried any unmarried woman in England, bringing up at once dazzling visions of the future coronet of Castlemaine, had no such effect upon Theodora Fontarini. She was American enough to regard it as a mere act of civility, but she remembered the meeting with Fermor the night before, just as Fermor had been impressed by her. Madame Fontarini made a smiling allusion to their meeting at Petersham House, twelve hours before, and then the conversation turned on Marsac, of the French Embassy.

The group was standing in the full light of the bright noon, all blue and gold. Madame Fontarini's dazzling white costume, of the sort unknown in England, made her conspicuous. Fermor, glancing

toward the roadway, saw a lady and gentleman walking their horses. It was Tom Bellenden and his wife. Fermor could have left the group at any moment, but Madame Fontarini's soft charm, the delicate but distinct differences between her and the English woman, were not lost on Fermor. He felt very much inclined to linger, and when he saw Mrs. Bellenden his inclination became a resolve. The conviction shot into Mrs. Bellenden's mind when she saw Fermor and Madame Fontarini walking through the cool green Park, followed by Lord Castlemaine and Seymour, that here was her rival.

Mrs. Bellenden was tolerably well informed concerning Seymour and his daughter, as her information to Lady Susan Battle had indicated. She understood, or thought she understood, the whole thing. It was the American, with her millions, her calm, assured air in speaking to men, her distinctive toilettes, who had lured away Fermor. Mrs. Bellenden hated all Americans, and the sight of Fermor walking with Madame Fontarini, who took it, as Mrs. Bellenden thought, in a ridiculously cool manner, made her hate them all the more, as a woman only can hate.

Another person was surprised and annoyed at the sight. This was Lady Susan Battle, who from the balcony of her house watched Fermor accompany Madame Fontarini to her own door. Lady Susan, accustomed to British conventions, concluded that when the heir to an earldom walked in broad day-

light from Hyde Park to Queen's Gate with an unmarried woman, that a marriage had already been arranged between them. With wrath and chagrin, she said as much to Jane Battle, her eldest stepdaughter.

"I should think," replied Jane calmly, "it would be a very good thing for Lord Fermor. The Americans have such oceans of money."

Lord Castlemaine always declared Jane to be the least objectionable of the Battle girls. As a matter of fact Jane possessed both good sense and good looks, and though by no means averse to Lord Fermor, had suffered no pangs of disappointed love when Lady Susan had admitted that Fermor could not be induced to take the notion seriously of an alliance with the house of Battle.

"But why can't Fermor marry an English woman?" Lady Susan demanded of Jane, as if Jane were responsible. "These American women, everybody knows, are thoroughly spoiled and lead their husbands a dance. But it is all the King's fault. If he had never taken up with them, we would not have seen these American duchesses and countesses elbowing one at every turn. There are not enough men in England to go around, and it is a hardship, I say, that the Americans should have the choice of them, and the King has something to answer for to British mothers."

Jane, being a discerning girl, was studying Madame Fontarini's costume, as she stood, her fluffy

white parasol tilted back, smiling into the faces of the three men grouped around her.

"I think, mamma," said Jane, "I should like to have a white gown like that, but I don't know where I could get it. I should not venture on the white shoes?—my feet are not small enough."

"I should think not," agreed Lady Susan. "I consider those white shoes enough to compromise any girl's character."

The group in the street separated, Seymour and his daughter going into their own house, while Lord Castlemaine and Fermor went into Castlemaine House. A part of the unspoken gratitude which Fermor felt for his father for offering him money, showed itself in his going home and lunching with him.

Lord Castlemaine's quick eye had caught sight of Lady Susan Battle upon the flower-decked balcony, under the awning, and he said, laughing, to Fermor:

"Your Aunt Susan witnessed our stroll with our neighbours, and she will probably take it out on me. I do not know why it is, but she seems a little afraid of you."

Fermour laughed.

"My aunt is a good woman, but very diverting," he said.

The father and son went together upstairs to the drawing-room. The day had grown hot as well as bright, and the balcony, cool and shaded, was a

pleasant place. Lord Castlemaine picked up a newspaper which lay on the table, while Fermor took up one of the quarterlies. After five minutes' reading, Lord Castlemaine laid down his newspaper and said to Fermor quietly, as if continuing their conversation of the night before:

"It is the best marriage that could be arranged for you. The lady is charming, the fortune is large; and if King's Lyndon is a part of the arrangement, it will more than maintain the family interest in Midlandshire."

Fermor laid down his magazine across his knee and lighted a cigarette, but said nothing. If anyone had told him at sunrise that before night he would meet a woman who would interest him, he would have gibed at the notion; he thought he had had enough of the feminine sex to last him the rest of his life. But just as Lord Castlemaine had unexpectedly changed his mind on the subject of American heiresses, since meeting Theodora Fontarini, so the thought of another feminine element in his life did not altogether displease Fermor. Nothing more was said and they sat reading on the balcony for half an hour. Then from Seymour's house, came the soft strains of a violin, touched by the delicate, skilful bow of a woman. Lord Castlemaine listened closely; he was no mean judge of music, and when the violin-playing ceased he looked significantly at Fermor, who glanced away as if he had not observed the music. He had heard every note.

## CHAPTER V

### Expiation

Theodora Fontarini on entering her house went into the first of the three great drawing-rooms which made a long vista of splendour. The lofty room was cool and redolent of flowers, placed lavishly about in it. Madame Fontarini seated herself in an armchair in front of the glass door that opened upon the balcony, shaded like those of its neighbours, and a riot of colour with its blooming plants.

Madame Fontarini gazed into the wide, sunny street, but her brooding eyes saw nothing. A change, faint indeed, but noticeable, seemed to have come into her life during those few weeks in England, and to-day she recognised it for the first time. At last, her tragic past seemed to be melting a little in that twilight of forgetfulness which is on the horizon of every human life.

Like all women, Theodora cherished her griefs, and they had been great, as had also her vicissitudes. On her marriage, at eighteen, with Pietro Fontarini, a splendid fortune was bestowed on her, and every precaution taken by her father that she should control it, but Pietro Fontarini was not the man to let his wife have any money and be at peace. At first he laughingly requested it of her, and she gave it

to him willingly. Later, when she made a faint and blushing protest, he demanded it of her violently, and Theodora, although she had not a drop of coward's blood in her body, was too bewildered, too inexperienced to resist. With a noble ignorance she sought to shame her husband by giving up to him in haughty silence, all he demanded of her. Nothing could have suited Pietro Fontarini better than this.

Although Theodora had quickly and rashly yielded to the soft seduction of love for the handsomest young Roman of them all, common sense and her own integrity of soul soon showed her Pietro Fontarini as he really was. No woman's love could survive that revelation. Pride and native dignity kept Theodora silent, under outrages that an older and more experienced woman would have made Pietro pay for dearly.

When her child was born the young mother of nineteen thought that compensation had at last come to her. The boy was noble minded like his mother, but the beautiful image of his father. The thought that he might resemble Pietro in other ways went like a knife to the heart of Theodora, and then, overwhelmed with remorse and considering it a crime to suspect a child of such latent iniquity, she would clasp him in her arms and shower caresses upon him. These things and the agony of the child's death had haunted her continually for six years past, and only lately, since she had come to England, had

she been able to withdraw her mind enough from them to take any interest in the world around her. During all those years of sadness her father's tenderness and patience had never failed, and it was for him that Madame Fontarini at last roused herself from the torpor of grief, and had taken up her life at the point it had been dropped when she entered upon those stormy years with Pietro Fontarini.

She had always been a great reader, and she resumed her books, after having cast them aside with bitterness for years, saying they could do nothing for her. In her girlhood she had been devoted to her violin, but that, too, had been abandoned till lately. Her father loved to hear her play upon her instrument, and since they came to London she had been under a master and found her old skill returning.

Of deeper things, although Theodora's mind was ever searching and weighing, she knew not what she thought or believed. The God of goodness, in whom she had trusted with childlike confidence until her marriage, became to her a relentless tormentor of souls. Pietro Fontarini reviled religion in every form, and shocked as Theodora was in the beginning, Fontarini's gibes and outpourings of contempt had not been without their effect. His family made great professions of religion and observed all the outward and ostentatious forms of piety, but Theodora had not seen in them much of the religion of the Nazarene.

The Fontarini family looked upon the marriage

of Pietro as a purely commercial arrangement, the exchange of rank for money, and inexperienced as they were in women of Theodora's type, it is hardly to be wondered that they held her partly accountable for Pietro Fontarini's complete demoralisation. Cardinal Fontarini alone did the young wife complete justice and gave her a degree of countenance and support that put her position beyond question. He had not forced religion upon her, seeing she was in no mood to accept anything as truth which savoured of mercy. But, deeply grateful, as Theodora was for the Cardinal's unfailing kindness and steady support, there was about him that aloofness, that detachment of soul, of an ecclesiastic who believes that sin is the only real evil.

Since she had been in England, Madame Fontarini had occasionally slipped into the open door of a church and remained a few moments. She had not yet been brought to her knees, but she was nearer submission than she had been for ten years past.

These things drifted dreamily through Theodora's mind as she sat still and silent, her inward gaze upon herself; then, strangely enough, she found herself thinking of other things, of the present and even of the future. Being all a woman, she was conscious of Lord Castlemaine's open admiration and marked attention to her, and, knowing well who and what he was, her woman's vanity was pleased. And Fermor—Madame Fontarini could not recall when she had met a man who interested and pleased her so

much upon a casual meeting. Even after that chance encounter the night before at Petersham House, she would have recognised him anywhere. She was actually speculating upon whether Fermor would call upon her or not, when her reverie was broken by her father's step behind her, and Seymour saying:

"Here is your music master, my dear."

Madame Fontarini rose at once and greeted Signor Barotti, the violin teacher. He was a small, dark, ugly little man, lacking an eye, but the one remaining was full of intelligence and playfulness. Theodora had thought that nothing could overcome her prejudice to the Italians, but Barotti's amiable temper and gaiety of heart conquered her good will as much as his mastery of the violin and his capacity to teach it commanded her respect. He was usually full of jokes, and this half-blind, poverty-stricken, hard-working Italian seemed to be the most cheerful person in London. Seymour was always present at the violin lessons, enjoying Barotti's quips and cranks as much as the music. To-day, however, the music master was silent and even morose. Theodora, before taking up her violin, went to a mirror and removed her white hat and smoothed her hair. She was surprised by Barotti saying, with some impatience:

"Pray, Madame, let us not lose time. I am late to-day and we must work to make up for lost time."

Theodora took up her violin, and meaning to

please and surprise Barotti, dashed into a bit of Brahms, full of wild harmonies mingled with a soft-recurring melody all passion and sadness. This was the music which floated into the next house, and charmed Lord Castlemaine and Fermor.

When Theodora finished she looked smilingly at Barotti, waiting for praise, but instead of a compliment, Barotti only said, fretfully, in Italian:

"Yes, yes, you do it well, pretty well, but why should you not? The violin is a greedy instrument. It will have those who play it to eat well, to sleep well, to have fresh air and not to degrade the bow-arm with labour. But there are some of us who have other masters to serve, than this greedy violin, who must play for hours with hunger gnawing at us, and weakening the play of the bow-arm, whose nerves are on the rack with sleepless nights, and whose minds are on things the rich call sordid. Oh, they are all alike, the rich!"

Barotti's face was working; he seemed consumed with rage and disgust at life.

Theodora set her violin and bow down on the piano. A quick, angry colour came into her pale cheeks, and she looked at Barotti in silence. Barotti grew frightened; he thought that she was offended with him and that he should lose his best pupil, and he stammered out something of the sort.

When Theodora spoke it was with gentleness.

"I think," she said, also in Italian, "that something must have gone very unfortunately with you

to-day. It is now two o'clock and luncheon is on the table. Suppose you come and have luncheon with us and finish scolding me at the table."

Then, turning to her father, she said in English:

"Come, papa, Mr. Barotti will have luncheon with us."

At this Barotti suddenly laid his head down on the piano and burst into a passion of weeping.

Theodora, touched and amazed, placed a soft hand on the poor violinist's arm, but it was Mr. Seymour who came up and said in a quick voice:

"Is there anything I can do for you? If it is a question of money——"

He dived down into his pockets as he spoke.

Barotti rushed away, through the second drawing-room into the third, where, half hidden by a window curtain, he gradually recovered his composure. In the first drawing-room Seymour, with a light in his usually sad eyes, was saying to Theodora:

"We must help the poor fellow. We can't let him suffer, you know."

Theodora smiled and patted her father's hand.

"I believe, papa, you have made some sort of a vow to help everybody that you can in distress."

"Not a vow, my dear, but an expiation——"

Seymour suddenly stopped. Theodora asked no questions. She had heard that word "expiation" spoken more than once by her father, but he had never offered any explanation of it and, with instinctive delicacy, his daughter refrained from ques-

tion or comment. In her own mind, Theodora believed her father to have committed some venial offence, and with the singular sensitiveness of conscience which distinguished him, he had determined to make of his life one long act of reparation.

In a minute or two, Barotti, somewhat composed, returned to the first drawing-room.

"I will tell you," he said to Theodora, "what breaks my heart to-day. My boy, Nicolo, has been ill for long. He is all I have in the world, and as fast as I made money I spent it on doctors and hospitals for Nicolo. Two weeks ago he grew more ill, and since it has been like tearing my heart from my body to leave the boy. But I could not give up my lessons. I think the lad is worse to-day, yet I was forced to leave him as usual. That is what made me so irritable to you, the kindest as well as the best of my pupils."

"It was nothing," replied Theodora, smiling; "let us go to luncheon and talk it over."

"My dear fellow," cried Seymour to Barotti, "why did not you speak of this before? Everything necessary shall be done for the boy, without cost to you."

Barotti was astounded at this, but Theodora took it as a matter of course, being accustomed to it from her childhood.

The three went down to the dining-room and Barotti recovered a little of his spirits in the atmosphere of kindness which surrounded him.

As soon as luncheon was over Seymour ordered a cab and went off in it with Barotti. Barotti's wide mouth wore a broad grin of delight and his one eye scintillated with joy and gratitude.

At five o'clock Seymour had not returned and Madame Fontarini went alone for her drive in the Park. The afternoon was glorious, and all gay London seemed to have poured itself into the Park. There was a blockade of carriages from Albert Gate to the Achilles statue, and the crowd of well-dressed men and women sitting in the chairs or leaning over the railing enjoyed the sight, at close quarters, of half the beauty of London.

Madame Fontarini, in her well-turned-out victoria and pair, bore the scrutiny calmly. She was accustomed to the observation and even to the free remarks of a Roman crowd, and the London multitude was nothing to that. To this, however, was one exception. At one point, where the line of carriages going in opposite directions was halted, an open carriage in which sat Mrs. Bellenden almost locked wheels for five minutes with Theodora's carriage. Mrs. Bellenden recognised Theodora instantly as the lady with whom Fermor had been seen walking and talking in the morning. Theodora was a personality, and personalties are easily numbered, especially when they are in sharp rivalry with a jealous woman. Mrs. Bellenden fixed a look of curiosity upon Theodora which soon became impertinent. Madame Fontarini had a good memory, but if she

had been inclined to forget, Mrs. Bellenden's cool, supercilious, but intense stare would have brought her to mind. Madame Fontarini, although acutely conscious of it, gave not the least sign of annoyance, but sat back in her victoria, apparently in calm unconsciousness of Mrs. Bellenden's fixed gaze. From mere impertinence it grew insulting; hatred and resentment were in it.

Theodora felt a shock of surprise and a sudden consciousness that this handsome spectacular-looking woman was an enemy. She was on her mettle, and when the carriage ahead of her moved and her coachman did not at once proceed, she was enough mistress of herself to give no order to him, but she was glad when she was out of the reach of Mrs. Bellenden's eyes.

It was after seven o'clock before Theodora returned home. No word had been received from Mr. Seymour. This somewhat disturbed Theodora. She knew her father's passion for doing charity, and it had happened more than once before that, going to see some sick person, he had remained the night and even several nights.

Madame Fontarini dressed for dinner and sat down alone to the table in the gorgeous dining-room. After dinner she went up into the dusky drawing-room, and declining to have the lamps lighted, sat alone in the twilight. It was quite nine o'clock and the light was fading out of the western sky, when a gentleman was announced at the door of the draw-

ing-room—Major Ashburton. Theodora rose as he advanced. His air and manner were those of a man of the world, and though he was short and plain he was far from insignificant—so much Theodora recognised at the first glance.

"Allow me to introduce myself—Major Ashburton, and this, I believe, is Madame Fontarini."

Madame Fontarini bowed and asked Ashburton to have a seat, which he took and continued:

"I have come with a message from Mr. Seymour. He desires me to say that, on going to the lodgings of Barotti, the music master, he found the boy, Nicolo, very ill with scarlet fever. The nurse, whom Barotti had hired, deserted the boy, and Mr. Seymour felt that his services were needed on the spot. He remained, therefore, until the doctor and another nurse were secured by telephone, but, of course, after having been several hours in the room with the boy, Mr. Seymour is in quarantine. I spoke with him from the door, as I was not allowed to enter the room, and he asked me to say to you, with his love, he would communicate with you every day and would return as soon as it was safe to do so."

"I was afraid of something of the sort," cried Theodora. "It is so like my father."

"Meanwhile," continued Ashburton, "Mr. Seymour directs that his man shall put up some clothes and other things desired, and I will take them in my cab, which is waiting."

"Thank you very much," replied Theodora, quickly, "I accept your favour gratefully."

She rang the bell, and sending for Seymour's valet, ordered him to put up the necessary things and take them down to the cab. Then she returned to Ashburton.

"It is very good of you, too," she said, smiling, "to do so much. I think we all would help Signor Barotti, or any one else in a like emergency, but some people, like my father, seem to have the knack of finding out emergencies."

To this, Ashburton said nothing. He was a natural celibate and not much interested in women, but Madame Fontarini appealed to him as being rather finer and stronger than the average woman. Besides she was of a type so different from English women that she attracted notice like an unusual flower in a garden. Ashburton's remark, however, was not of a poetic sort. He said:

"There is an immense deal of scarlet fever about. I have heard of a dozen cases within a week."

Madame Fontarini was a little puzzled. Was this gentleman a doctor? She remembered that army surgeons were in England given military titles.

"Perhaps your profession," she said, "brings you in the way of finding out about these things."

"My profession is, or was, the army," replied Ashburton.

Madame Fontarini smiled with a pretty air of

knowing something which her companion did not wish her to find out.

"I understand," she said; "you are like my father, one of those men who like to do good, and search for occasions."

Ashburton's face flushed crimson up to the roots of his sandy hair. In truth, he hated to be found out.

"All of us must do some good," he began blunderingly.

"Oh, yes," answered Madame Fontarini, easily, "but all of us do not hunt up scarlet fever cases. Not that one need really be so afraid of it, unless there are children——" she stopped suddenly and a change came over her face.

"Perhaps," said Ashburton, misunderstanding her and rising hastily, "you may be afraid for your children. I assure you I was not in the room."

"I have no children," responded Madame Fontarini, and repeated in a low voice, "I have no child."

Something in her tone told that she had once had a child, and it was no more. Ashburton said nothing, but, looking into Theodora's eyes, a kind of psychic understanding came to both the man and the woman. The craving for sympathy and the consciousness that Ashburton was sympathetic in the highest degree, made Madame Fontarini say in the same low voice:

"I had a child, a beautiful man-child. If he were alive he would be quite as tall as my shoulder."

Then Tompkins, Mr. Seymour's valet, passed down the stair, carrying his master's portmanteau. Madame Fontarini, going to a vase of roses, took from it three beautiful red roses.

"Give this one to my father with my love," she said, smiling and handing one to Ashburton, "and give him this one with my dear love, and the third one with my dearest love."

Ashburton's shrewd eyes expressed surprise. He had never known an English daughter on quite these terms of affectionate intimacy with her father, which Theodora's words suggested. He had been struck before by Seymour's tender solicitude for his daughter, and the whole thing was as beautiful as it was unusual to Ashburton, who knew nothing of American daughter-worship. He bowed himself out, and Theodora, for the second time that day, felt a sensation of interest and admiration concerning a man.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Portal of the Heart

Several days passed and Seymour remained absent, but every day Theodora received a letter from him. Ashburton, however, did not again call, which Theodora regretted, feeling a desire to know him better. And, although going out in society gave her no particular pleasure, she accepted invitations and paid visits as a relief from the sharp introspection, which she now shrank from for the first time in years. Theodora also laid aside certain books, like those of Pascal and Amiel, which she had read too much, seeing in them the reflection of her own questioning and despondent soul. She began to wish for friends, and determined to cultivate those persons who showed a kindly interest in her. The first of these were the Marsacs, and Theodora really enjoyed the day when Madame Marsac lunched with her. Madame Marsac's French grace and her quick Gallic sympathy appealed to Theodora. Marsac, who knew everything, knew Theodora's history and had told Madame Marsac. This gave Madame Marsac much insight into Theodora's character.

In passing to and from her carriage in the afternoon and evening and in going for her morning walk in the Park, Theodora was often seen by her

neighbours, including Fermor. His masculine eye could not but be pleased by Madame Fontarini's exquisite naturalness of appearance and her air and manner; they were those of a girl of twenty. Madame Fontarini, though, was no girl, but a woman who had lived through storms and tempests that would have wrecked most women. Once or twice they met, in the street, and talked for a few minutes. But, as Fermor had not seen fit to avail himself of Seymour's cordial American invitation to call, Theodora did not linger in Lord Fermor's company.

As for Fermor, he was more sensitive to Madame Fontarini's charm than she suspected, but, like a true-born Briton, he postponed everything concerning women for what he considered more important affairs. At that moment he was deep in county politics, as it was obvious that there would very soon be a vacancy in the division. Of course he was bombarded with frantic letters from Flora Bellenden, which he regularly threw unread into the fire. She would have waylaid him if she could, but Fermor was resolute, and when he saw her, passed by on the other side, gazing straight at her and smiling, so there could be no pretence that he did not see her.

Two persons, Mrs. Bellenden and Lady Susan Battle, expected daily the announcement of Fermor's engagement to Madame Fontarini, to whom he had not so far paid a single visit.

One rainy afternoon, during the week of Seymour's absence, Fermor determined to pay a visit of ceremony to Madame Fontarini, but, just as he made his resolve, he saw Lord Castlemaine wending his way next door. Fermor promptly concluded to wait until he should see his father emerge from Madame Fontarini's door.

Theodora, sitting at her solitary tea table, in the vast suite of drawing-rooms, watched the grey rain come down in sheets. On the table beside her lay an open volume of Amiel, to which the sad grey day had once more drawn her. A longing was in her heart for companionship, and it was with a sensation of pleasure she heard Lord Castlemaine announced. He entered, bringing with him the atmosphere of strength, power and interest which was ever his own.

"I meant to call long before," he said, "but there is an attorney in town by the name of Stratton who seems to own me as Mephistopheles owned Faust. However, to-day I claimed my freedom and determined to come in and pay my respects to you."

Then Madame Fontarini explained that her father was not at home and went on, quite as a matter of course, to tell the story of Barotti's stricken child.

"In my youth," said Lord Castlemaine, receiving his first cup of tea, "nobody ever heard of these incursions upon the poor, and we didn't know such

a place as the East End existed. Now, it is something like the days of John Wesley. I shouldn't be surprised to see my son, Lord Fermor, going around bare-footed in a brown habit with a straw rope around his waist."

"Has Lord Fermor any ascetic leanings?" asked Theodora in good faith.

"Oh, Lord, no! Not that ever I heard, only this is the age of extremists and of everybody meddling with everybody else's business. I am a reactionary. I don't believe in A and B deciding between themselves that C shall assume the moral and financial responsibility for D."

"That is not my father's way," replied Madame Fontarini, laughing; "he himself shoulders A, B, C, and D without asking any one to help him."

"Then I consider Mr. Seymour may be classed as a dangerous person and an enemy of society. If he carries out these practices at King's Lyndon I shall have Longstaffe burned over my head by the farm labourers because I will not do like Mr. Seymour. By the way, I think you will like King's Lyndon—that is, if you like the country."

"I love the country," answered Theodora.

"So do I, when I can get enough people from town down there to make me feel that London is not so far away, after all. Are you reading this?" He picked up from the table the volume of Amiel which Theodora had been reading.

"Yes," she replied.

"Old Montaigne is a better man to read than Amiel, and Voltaire best of all. Forty years ago I would have been chased out of a London drawing-room for saying so much, but now the ladies have invaded our libraries, just as they have the smoking-room."

"My reading is not very profound," said Madame Fontarini. "I read, as I suppose all women do, to find out in books some reflection of my own mental and moral portrait."

"My dear lady, you are much too candid; you will never be able to pass as a superior person as long as you say things like that."

"What is a superior person?"

"My sister, Lady Susan Battle, for example. She married a Birmingham man with five daughters, and Susan labours in the London season, and out of the London season, to get those girls married."

Madame Fontarini looked shocked; she was not yet fully accustomed to the English frankness concerning marriage. Lord Castlemaine saw this and laughed. Madame Fontarini, with her distinction of bearing, if not actual beauty, and her father's fortune, would perhaps not understand either the difficulty or the necessity of marrying off the five plain Battle girls, each with ten thousand pounds to her fortune. He continued, much amused at the unconscious amazement which shone in Madame Fontarini's eyes.

"It would be easy enough to get young stock-

brokers and rising barristers for those girls, but my sister Susan is ambitious. She wants all her step-daughters to marry the eldest sons of dukes. For some occult reason she thinks that I could bring it about, and regards me as a brute because I don't. You must know Lady Susan—excellent person. I will make her call on you."

Just then the door was opened and Marsac was announced. He seated himself, and demanded tea and silence, while he told a thrilling tale.

"This afternoon I demanded liberty of my chief, who would have kept me at the Embassy. I revolted when Madame Marsac would have shut me up in a brougham and taken me around to pay duty calls. I said, 'No, I go to Madame Fontarini's to pour out my soul to her.' Madame Marsac accepted this meekly, seeing a furious determination in my eye. I have met a couple of Americans—not Anglo-Americans, nor Franco-Americans, nor any other hyphenated Americans, but the unadulterated Americans."

"How lucky," murmured Theodora.

"It was in the train coming up from Brighton, day before yesterday. A young man got in—unmistakably American—also his sister, Dot. Dot is about six feet tall, with glorious black eyes, wide apart, superb teeth, such as you Americans affect—I understand that Americans are in the hands of dentists from the cradle to the grave. Dot, however, was charming, that I must admit, and ordered

her brother around with a Napoleonic air—also, the common heritage of the American woman. The young man, Wyndham, I soon found out was a journalist, and as I have always yearned after my early profession, I began to talk with him. And Dot immediately hurled herself into the conversation. They were a brother and sister travelling in Europe, with oceans of money to spend. The rich journalist, you know, is also peculiar to America. "Dot, who is only eighteen, and who has not yet been presented to society, appears to be in charge of her brother, who is about thirty. Wyndham spoke the American language in all its purity. He had been in Paris and had met a number of French journalists there. I asked him if he felt at home among them, to which he replied:

"'No, I felt like a ham sandwich at a Jew picnic.'

"Dot promptly reproved her brother; she herself spoke a delightful mixture of English and American. The curious part of it was that I understood every word and phrase of the American language. For instance, when Wyndham told me that a certain banking concern had 'busted,' I comprehended at once. Dot reminded her brother that he should say 'bursted,' but Wyndham replied that the best authorities agreed that the 'r' in bursted was superfluous, and 'busted' was the classic form of the word. I had never understood so fully what is called the Oriental spaciousness of the American mind, until I talked with Wyndham."

"I am always delighted to hear my country-people praised," said Theodora.

"Living in England is the crumpled rose leaf in your fate," remarked Lord Castlemaine.

"I was so fascinated," continued Marsac, "with Wyndham and Dot, who, by the way, was exquisitely dressed, like all the rest of your country women that I have ever met, Madame, that I gave Wyndham my card. He handed me his in return. He and Dot are stopping at one of the swellest London hotels. Dot has neither maid nor chaperon, but appears entirely superior to both. Wyndham, it seems, has very good letters of introduction, and the two have been to some excellent houses. Imagine my pleasure, when, last night, at a great dinner given by the editor of a big London newspaper, I found Wyndham and Dot on hand. Dot wore a magnificent gown, which Madame Marsac admired so much I fear it has wrecked my domestic peace for ever, and was aglitter with diamond brooches and pins, and things all over her. In the drawing-room before dinner, Dot engaged in conversation with a member of parliament and a retired major general. Her *aplomb* was perfect. She looked thoroughly disgusted when she was handed over to a nice boy, Jack Thornycroft, to be taken down to dinner; I think she expected the member of parliament, at least."

"My sister, Lady Susan Battle, was there," said Lord Castlemaine, laughing. "She had with her

Jane, her eldest step-daughter, who really is not so bad, after all."

"I saw Lady Susan and Mr. Battle and the young lady. I have the honour of their acquaintance," replied Marsac.

"Lady Susan was raging this morning because your friend, Dot, was given to the Thornycroft boy, who is the eldest son of a baronet. Lady Susan likes eldest sons."

Marsac, demanding a second cup of tea, proceeded:

"The boy appeared to succumb immediately to Dot's black eyes and brilliant smile, and loftily superior manner. Meanwhile, my friend Wyndham, who had taken Miss Battle down, seemed equally charmed with her."

Lord Castlemaine chuckled at this, without mentioning what amused him; the notion of Lady Susan with an American son-in-law would have made a graven image smile.

"I should like very much to know my interesting compatriots," said Madame Fontarini. "I should be glad if Mr. Wyndham would call to see me."

"What an amusing people you are, after all!" cried Lord Castlemaine. "You never saw or heard of these people before, yet, with your American social recklessness, you are ready to rush into an acquaintance with them. Marsac, of course, is an outlaw and prides himself on knowing all the knife-grinders and rat-catchers in town."

Lord Castlemaine had known and liked Marsac for twenty years and they often sharpened their wit, one upon the other.

"But you can't expect so much conservation of us, as of you," answered Madame Fontarini. "I am willing to take M. Marsac's word, for both Mr. Wyndham and his sister Dot, and what is more natural, than that exiles as we are, my father and I, we should be eager to meet some of our own country-people?"

Lord Castlemaine, amused and incredulous, shook his head.

"I have long ago come to the conclusion," he said, "that no one born in a monarchy can understand one born in a republic; and no one born in a republic can understand one born in a monarchy. Your country-people, my dear Madame Fontarini, are full of quaint surprises, and that is what makes you so charming."

The visit of Lord Castlemaine and Marsac was long and agreeable, and when Lord Castlemaine rose to leave he insisted that Marsac should go, too, declaring he could not leave his reputation in Marsac's hands. The two went down the staircase arm in arm, laughing and chaffing each other. Madame Fontarini's parting injunction to Marsac was to be sure and bring Wyndham and Dot to call.

The mental exhilaration produced by the conversation with two such men as Lord Castlemaine

and Marsac lifted Theodora out of her mood of loneliness and despondency. She did not return to her book, but taking up her violin played a soft little air upon it, as she walked up and down the large room.

The afternoon was closing in and a little fire on the hearth threw a red light upon her graceful figure and trailing gown of pale yellow. She did not hear, upon the thickly carpeted staircase, the step of the footman who escorted Lord Fermor to the door, nor even the first announcement of his name. Fermor had a good view of her for half a minute as she stood drawing her bow with a long graceful motion over the strings. She showed no surprise at his entrance, but laying down her violin, greeted him with perfect ease.

One of the things which Fermor disliked most in his social life was the rapture with which he, the prospective heir to an earldom, was received in a London drawing-room. He also rebelled against the strange convention of English society, by which an eligible bachelor is practically forbidden to pay the smallest civility to an unmarried woman without having his intentions eagerly canvassed. He recognised instantly that Madame Fontarini, composed and unaffected, was neither embarrassed nor elated at his visit. She offered him a cup of tea and Fermor, for the first time in his life, felt himself entirely at ease when alone with a lady who might consider him a desirable *parti*.

"Lord Castlemaine was kind enough to call to see me this afternoon," said Theodora, following a short pause.

"So I know," replied Fermor. "I was in the act of coming myself, when I saw my father leaving the house, and, as I did not wish to have a collision, I postponed my visit until his was over."

Then Theodora, busying herself with the tea-cups, explained to Fermor, as she had explained to Lord Castlemaine, the reasons for her father's absence, and Fermor, like Lord Castlemaine, was secretly surprised. Something in the atmosphere and soft firelight, the vast silent house, made their conversation grow personal and almost intimate, from the beginning. Lord Fermor spoke of King's Lyndon, saying:

"I am glad to know that the place will be in the hands of persons who will maintain it as it should be. It has been a regret to me to see it going to rack and ruin, and it was not in my father's power to restore it."

Madame Fontarini, with her woman's wit, discerned in Fermor's guarded word that he was attached to King's Lyndon, and giving it up permanently would be to him a sacrifice, necessary, it is true, but none the less painful.

"I was charmed with the place when I saw it," she said. "My father, of course, insisted that I should see it before he leased it, so I went down with him and we spent the day there."

"Wonderful are American fathers," thought Fermor.

"I believe in restoration, but not changes," continued Madame Fontarini. "We concluded to live in the west wing. There is a charming little drawing-room, opening on the terrace, and I determined that it should be mine. Everything in it pleased me and I shall have it restored exactly as it was originally."

"That was my mother's morning room," answered Fermor. "She died when I was a little chap, only five years old, and my only recollection of her is sitting in that room and walking up and down the terrace, holding me by the hand. King's Lyndon came to us through my mother. Longstaffe, our other place, is only ten miles off, so I shall ask the privilege of paying my respects to you when you are established at King's Lyndon."

"It will give my father and me much pleasure, and I hope we shall be good neighbours."

Then the conversation turned upon Rome. Theodora spoke readily in general terms of Roman life, but sedulously avoided any allusion to her own unhappy Roman experience. Fermor, pleased and soothed as men are by a sympathetic woman, was beginning to feel that Lord Castlemaine's suggestion concerning Madame Fontarini was far from preposterous. He was wearied and sceptical concerning what, in his own life, women had called their love for him, and thought when

he married he would rather like the arrangement to be one of friendship and suitability. The French plan had always seemed to him rather more promising of happiness than the English plan. He felt tolerably sure that if a woman possessed enough of charm, of breeding, of intelligence, to make him willing to spend the rest of his life with her, she would in the end become mistress of his heart. Girls had been thrown at his head, as they are at the heads of all men in England of Fermor's rank. This is a thing universally detested by all men, but most of all by Fermor.

Madame Fontarini, with her attraction of person and fortune, would have a large choice in marriage, and Fermor, while listening to her tea-table talk, so different from that of the Englishwoman, was thinking it was certainly much more flattering to be chosen from others by a woman like Madame Fontarini, than to become the quarry of a man-chasing mother and daughter. In the midst of their quiet talk fell a bomb.

"Will you pardon me for asking," said Madame Fontarini, "if the lady with whom I saw you talking at Patersham House is Mrs. Bellenden, of Chester Street?"

Fermor put down his tea cup, and, schooled though he was, Theodora saw unmistakable surprise on his part.

"Yes," he answered briefly.

"I meant to ask the question of M. Marsac,"

said Theodora, with a frank smile, "but forgot it. I have met Mrs. Bellenden several times in driving, and she has always stared at me, I think most disagreeably. You may imagine my surprise when to-day she left cards upon me. I was not at home and did not see her, but I questioned the servant, and there is no doubt the visit was meant for me. I shall leave my card on her, but I don't intend to begin a visiting acquaintance with Mrs. Bellenden. Her air is very insolent."

Fermor was silent and Madame Fontarini continued, laughing as she spoke:

"I see you are quite shocked at my mentioning Mrs. Bellenden's name. Nobody ever mentions names in England, but remember I am an American and have been in England only a little while, and many things are still strange to me."

Fermor grasped in an instant Mrs. Bellenden's motive, for the mere fact that Madame Fontarini lived in the next house to Castlemaine House and would preside over King's Lyndon, certainly for the next six months, was enough to start rumors, which Mrs. Bellenden had heard or surmised. It was hateful to Fermor that he could not keep wholly clear of Flora Bellenden. He felt a strong desire to warn Madame Fontarini against Mrs. Bellenden, but he, of all men, could least do that. The silence was becoming awkward, when the sound of a cab stopping at the door and a step upon the pavement was heard.

"That is my father!" cried Theodora, rising and going to the window. "Major Ashburton is with him. You may know," she said, turning to Fermor, who had risen also, "he has been just as much interested in Barotti's child as my father."

Nothing could surprise Fermor any more that afternoon, not even the deeply affectionate greeting between Madame Fontarini and her father, who entered the drawing-room as Fermor was about to leave it.

"I am delighted to see you," cried Seymour, shaking hands warmly with Fermor. "We are neighbours not only in town, but shall be in the country."

And then, before he could carry out his intention of introducing Ashburton to Fermor, the two men greeted each other like old friends.

"Come," cried Theodora to her father and Ashburton, whom she was sincerely glad to see, "let me give you some tea, and hear all about Barotti's boy, and your own heroism. Papa, I have had a levee this afternoon, Lord Castlemaine first, and then M. Marsac, Lord Fermor, Major Ashburton and yourself."

She showed so much animation that Seymour was delighted. It was long since he had seen her so interested. A few months ago she would have refused with languor and indifference to see anyone.

"You really must remain," said Seymour, in his hearty American way, to Fermor, and Fermor

for the first time in his life sat down again after making his adieux. Seymour and Theodora did most of the talking. Ashburton was naturally a silent man, and Fermor's brain was still busy with the annoyance of Mrs. Bellenden's visit.

Barotti's child was getting quite well, with everything done for him, and as soon as the boy was able he was to be taken to Bournemouth. Seymour declared he had quite enjoyed his quarantine, which had been mitigated by visits from Ashburton. It was plain the two men understood each other well and had become friends. Quite half an hour passed, from the time Seymour and Ashburton arrived, until Fermor and Ashburton departed together.

A family Vidocq, in the person of Lady Susan Battle, had seen from her own drawing-room window, Fermor enter the Seymour house and leave it, after what Lady Susan considered a scandalous length of time.

"It is all settled," she remarked despairingly to Jane. "There is not even a chance of you being bridesmaid at the wedding, because widows don't have bridesmaids. It is entirely the King's fault and he will have a heavy reckoning to answer for in letting the best matches in England go to these Americans. Of course, a spoiled minx, as this Madame Fontarini must be, can never get along with Fermor. They will disagree in a year, and mark my words, in less than five years there will be a separation and Fermor will not be five thousand

pounds better off than if he had never married an American fortune. Then, there will be a horrid scandal and it will reflect upon the whole family connection, and the King will be at the bottom of it. I shall not hesitate to say that everywhere."

Fermor, however, was not thinking about American fortunes, or the sins of King Edward VII. He was cursing himself and Mrs. Bellenden from the bottom of his sincere heart.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Perplexities of Lady Susan

Lady Susan's troubles and perplexities concerning Americans were by no means confined to Lord Fermor and Madame Fontarini, but came even nearer home. With a suddenness that appalled not only Lady Susan, but honest Joshua Battle, Wyndham and his sister, the tall beauty who went by the name of Dot, seemed to become inexplicably entangled with the Battle family.

Nothing would have induced Lady Susan to call on Miss Wyndham, or to allow her in the splendid Battle house, but destiny, in a spirit of dread playfulness, arranged that the Battles and the Wyndhams should meet six days running, at different garden parties, at flower shows, in picture galleries, at Hurlingham, and, in short, it seemed that Jane Battle and Wyndham were together on all occasions.

Lady Susan's idea of a New York journalist was an individual who earned something like two pounds the week, and was purchasable at a low rate by any political party. Wyndham dressed well and lived at a good hotel, all of which Lady Susan supposed to be acquired by nefarious means. When she discovered that he had a good suite of rooms at a first-class hotel, she at once concluded that the hotel gave him

his living free in order to get the advertising. Dot's gowns and hats, which were really works of art, Lady Susan concluded were got by the same means, and she easily convinced herself that Wyndham and his sister were a couple of dangerous adventurers, from whom her flock of step-daughters should be rigidly guarded. She was scarcely surprised when at a very large and smart garden party, the first persons she saw were Wyndham and Dot. Lady Susan turned a warning eye upon Jane, who had been previously notified to keep Wyndham at bay if possible. Jane honestly meant to obey, but she had no way of avoiding Wyndham except by frankly running away, when he made straight toward her, and engaged in animated conversation. To make the matter worse, at that very moment Jack Thornycroft appeared and was promptly confiscated, according to Lady Susan's opinion, by Dot. It was plain, however, that he was a willing captive as he walked with her toward the tea table. He was not, however, allowed to enjoy his prize long, for in ten minutes Dot had left him absolutely in the lurch, in favour of an Under Secretary of State, old enough to be her grandfather.

Lady Susan turned from this revolting spectacle to find Wyndham deep in conversation with Jane. When Lady Susan made a prompt and determined sortie, meant to rescue Jane, Wyndham executed a flank movement, by which, before Lady Susan knew it, she was seated at the same table with him

and Joshua Battle's eldest born, who was destined never to become Countess of Castlemaine. It was all very simple. Wyndham, who was by nature a strategist of the first order, hailed a passing waiter, found a little table in the greenest and coolest corner of the garden, and carried Jane off under Lady Susan's indignant eye. Then, having secured his Sabine prey, he returned to Lady Susan, standing wrathful and astonished in the garden walk, and said in the most insinuating manner:

"I asked for tea for three, and it is there on the table. Permit me to escort you."

It was quite impossible that Jane should be allowed to have tea alone with an American journalist in full sight of the smartest people in London; so Lady Susan was forced to go with Wyndham in order to protect her step-daughter, as she felt it in her own mind.

By way of preventing Jane from being beguiled by this handsome and oily-tongued American, for so Lady Susan was forced to admit Wyndham to be, she herself took charge of the conversation.

"I suppose everything in England is very new and interesting to you," she said sternly.

"Very interesting," replied Wyndham, "but hardly new, as I have been here fifteen or twenty times before."

"Then," said Lady Susan majestically, "you must have spent the best part of your life here, for I see you are still a young man.'"

"Sometimes," said Wyndham, laughing, "I have made the round trip between London and New York in three weeks."

"Have you good hotels in New York?" asked Lady Susan.

"Pretty fair," answered Wyndham.

Lady Susan then making some inquiries as to the population and resources of the United States, Wyndham proceeded to give her a rapid statistical account of which she believed not one single word. Even Jane, with innocent eyes fixed on Wyndham's mobile and expressive face, felt a faint doubt of him when he wound up by saying that the United States could put fourteen millions of fighting men in the field. Could it be that Wyndham was, as she had heard all Americans were, a braggart? The suspicion carried a pang to Jane's gentle heart.

There was triumph in Lady Susan's eye. The statements that the United States had fourteen millions of men capable of bearing arms, and had one hundred cities each with over a hundred thousand population, were, to her, gross and palpable lies, like the Father who made them and all other lies.

"It is a great pity," said Lady Susan, however, "that you can't get decent people to go into politics in your country."

Wyndham laughed at this.

"May I ask," he said, "how you got your information?"

"From several Americans who live in England," responded Lady Susan promptly.

"I should say," responded Wyndham, "that most expatriated Americans ought to be in jail."

"Do you mean that they are criminals?" cried Lady Susan, who was ready to believe anything of Americans.

"No, I didn't say they could be put in jail, I merely said they ought to be in jail. They are the disseminators of false information about their own country, of which they generally know very little and care less."

Then Wyndham turned the conversation toward Jane in a manner which Lady Susan thought simply scandalous. This consisted in paying the girl adroit compliments, and, what was really alarming, Jane seemed to like them.

Lady Susan rose, determined to take her stepdaughter out of such dangerous company, but she found Wyndham not easily thrown over. He remained by Jane's side, where he had been ever since she entered the garden. This meant, in the eyes of Lady Susan and her world, but one thing, that the man in the case was prepared to make the girl an offer of marriage at the first convenient season. Anything more horrifying, Lady Susan could not contemplate. The daughters of Joshua Battle would each have on her marriage ten thousand pounds down, a sum not to be despised, and more at the death of their father. It was Lady Susan's am-

bition that her step-daughter should profit by their connection with the house of Castlemaine. But if people should see this American savage, for so Lady Susan reckoned Wyndham to be, whose mother was probably a chambermaid, and his father a bootblack, it would be enough to ruin Jane's prospects for that season, if not for ever. The one thing left was to take Jane away, which Lady Susan promptly proceeded to do.

Wyndham escorted them to the carriage and bade them a cordial farewell, promising to send Jane a book on America out of which she could get some facts, instead of the pipe dreams, as he called them, which prevailed in England on American matters.

Once in the big landau, Lady Susan's wrath exploded.

"I have read in the newspapers," she said indignantly to Jane, "that Americans were presumptuous, and now I know it. Anything to exceed the presumption of that young man I have never seen in my life."

"He did not do anything, mamma, except be civil to us," said Jane meekly. Though meek, Jane was not timid. She liked Wyndham and could not be terrorised into saying she did not.

"Remember this, however," said Lady Susan, in what Lord Castlemaine irreverently called her parade-ground voice, "there is to be no repetition of what occurred this afternoon. It was most detrimental to you, my dear, from every point of view."

Jane said nothing. Something of Wyndham's own free and independent spirit, his frankness, his open liking for her, had communicated itself to her. The germ of independence was stirring in her gentle breast, and she made no promises to keep Wyndham at a distance. To her clearer understanding, Wyndham's attentions, although far more significant than he supposed them to be, were not what Lady Susan understood them.

"Mr. Wyndham says," she said to her stepmother, as the carriage rolled through the Park, "that in America it is quite natural for men and girls to be good friends, without meaning anything more. I think it must be very pleasant to be able to know an agreeable man and talk with him, without anybody remarking upon it, or wanting to know if he wishes to marry one. That is what I hate," cried Jane, with sudden courage. "If people would only stop talking about one! Every time a man looks at one of us, people are wondering whether he knows about our ten thousand pounds, and what kind of a settlement he can make, and if the match will be too grand for our father's family, or not grand enough for yours, mamma."

Lady Susan was amazed. The modern way of a girl asserting herself was very painful to ladies of the early Victorian type, and Lady Susan felt it her duty to check it. Jane had always been so respectful, so admirable a step-daughter, that it was hard for Lady Susan to find fault with her. How-

ever, she was sternly admonished to avoid Wyndham in future. Jane received these commands in silence, but not acquiescence.

Next morning Jane came into Lady Susan's morning room, bringing a book.

"This is what Mr. Wyndham sent me by post this morning," she said. "It is all about America, and I have looked at it and, really, what Mr. Wyndham was telling us yesterday was perfectly true."

Lady Susan examined the book carefully to make sure that there was not a love letter concealed among its pages of statistics, but finding nothing, she only remarked, as she handed it back:

"Recollect, Jane, that man is capable of anything. I see plainly that he intends to ask you to marry him very shortly, and you must make him understand when he forces his offer upon you that it cannot be considered for one moment."

"I don't think he means to make an offer," remarked Jane, blushing deeply. "He has never said anything to me except what was merely friendly."

At that moment Lady Susan's attention was distracted by a splendid touring car stopping in front of the house, from which descended Dot, while Wyndham remained seated in the car. There was no time to tell the footman that the ladies were not at home, and before Lady Susan or Jane could catch breath, in marched Dot. There was something splendid and overpowering in her personality. It was not the soft, seductive charm of Madame Fon-

tarini, who had known sorrow and shame and loss, and who had been worsted in her conflict with the world, and knew its cruel power. This tall young beauty, so far, had everything her own way and had taken the world by storm. She swept into the room; her dress ruthlessly elegant, her manner determinedly affable.

"I must beg your pardon," she said, smiling, while her black eyes fearlessly examined Lady Susan, "for presenting myself at such an hour of the morning, but I wish to engage a maid who has given you as a reference."

Lady Susan was staggered. Hotel rooms and fine clothes and even automobiles may be had without payment, if used as advertisement, so Lady Susan had heard, but maids could not be had without money, and what use could the sister of a journalist have for a maid anyhow?

Miss Wyndham's questions concerning the maid would have done credit to forty instead of eighteen, in their comprehensiveness. When she had figuratively turned both Lady Susan and the maid inside out, she rose to go, saying to Jane, who felt that same strange affinity with this beautiful barbarian that she had with Wyndham himself.

"It was so nice to see you at the garden party yesterday. My brother was perfectly charmed with you."

Then she was gone, and the motor car whirled away from the door magnificently.

"Such impertinence," gasped Lady Susan, "to intrude herself into this house! No doubt she wished an invitation to call, but she got none."

"She didn't say anything that looked like it," responded Jane. "Her errand was quite legitimate."

Lady Susan glanced suspiciously at Jane. Was it possible——? No, the idea was not to be entertained.

Jane, however, did not think it necessary to mention she had said to Wyndham that on the present afternoon she was going to an exhibition of pictures in Bond Street, and Wyndham had intimated he would be likely to want to see those identical pictures himself.

By the time Lady Susan had recovered from the shock of Wyndham's attentions the day before, and Dot's apparition in the morning, and the flock of Battle girls had chirped and twittered over Wyndham's attentions to Jane, the afternoon came and Lady Susan marshalled her step-daughters to the picture show. And there, towering over most of the men present, was Dot, radiantly dressed, and her brother, whose sleek dark head just reached her shoulder, was on hand.

Lady Susan tried to protect Jane, but could not prevent a subtle interchange of remarks between her and Wyndham, which was dangerously near an appointment to meet later in the week. Wyndham boldly inquired where Jane would be found on the

Saturday afternoon, and Jane promptly replied that she would be at Hurlingham.

"So will I," said Wyndham, looking her in the eye with that solemnity which Jane had discovered Americans adopted when making a joke.

At the end of ten days, Wyndham's persecution of Jane, so Lady Susan called it, compelled her to lay the matter before her brother, Lord Castlemaine. She had laid it before Joshua Battle at the rate of three times a day during the whole ten days, but Mr. Battle had declared, with perfect truth and candour, that if Lady Susan could not stop the affair, certainly he could not.

Lady Susan then called upon Lord Castlemaine to forbid Wyndham to speak to or look at Jane.

"Why?" asked Lord Castlemaine, laughing. "With five unmarried girls on your hands I should think you would hail Wyndham's advances."

Lady Susan explained that Wyndham was probably an adventurer; that his salary could hardly be more than a hundred pounds a year; that he no doubt got his rooms at a first-class hotel, his clothes and his motor as advertisement; that no doubt he was after Jane's ten thousand pounds, and, worse than all, he was an American.

"And so far," said Lady Susan majestically, looking full at Fermor, who was present, "our family has escaped an American connection. I should regret very much if the first introduction of that undesirable element should occur through me."

"Oh Lord!" said Lord Castlemaine. "Here am I doing everything I can to introduce an American element into the family through Madame Fontarini and Fermor."

Fermor took this allusion with great outward calmness, but inwardly he rather resented that anything so delicate and intangible as the feeling which was dawning in his heart toward Theodora should be dragged out and exhibited in Lord Castlemaine's usual fashion.

"American money may be useful and even necessary in some cases," replied Lady Susan, "but not in the case of Mr. Battle's daughters."

"It is not altogether money," continued Lord Castlemaine. "Madame Fontarini herself counts for a good deal in the game. She does not look like most women. I like that black hair of hers done up so simply, and the way she avoids rings and chains and earrings. Besides, she is a very interesting woman. I expect to keep up a visiting acquaintance with her when she is established at King's Lyndon, and I shall go to her garden party next week. All, of course, with a view of fostering an alliance between our two houses."

Lord Castlemaine grinned as he fired this last shot, and Fermor rose.

"Really," he said, "this is getting too personal for a bashful man like myself. I feel obliged to leave."

Then, by way of finishing up Lady Susan and the

conversation at the same time, Lord Castlemaine remarked:

"The only difficulty in the way is whether Madame Fontarini will take Fermor or not, and whether an alliance with the house of Castlemaine is good enough for her."

This sentence acted exactly as Lord Castlemaine wished, and reduced Lady Susan to amazed and indignant silence.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Weaving and Unweaving

It was now late in June, and the season gained impetus as it rushed toward its conclusion.

Theodora and her father were eager to get away from town, but King's Lyndon had been suffered to fall into such decay that workmen were necessary to make even one wing fairly comfortable. Theodora had been sufficiently roused from her sadness to go out a little into society, but not enough to open the splendid town house and entertain as her father would have wished. She agreed, however, to give a small party in the spacious garden at the back of the mansion, and at this evidence of her renewed interest in life Seymour rejoiced.

When Madame Fontarini made out her list of invitations, she smiled slightly at some of the names. Major Ashburton, she particularly wished to come. There was something in him which to her sensitive mind gave dignity to any company in which he appeared. But she knew instinctively that he did not often go to garden parties, and in sending him a card she wrote a pretty little note besides. She felt a secret desire that Fermor should come, and an inward conviction that he would be there.

In looking over her visiting book, she found the

name of Mrs. Bellenden. Theodora glanced at it, and then with her small firm hand drew a line through the name. She had heard nothing, and knew nothing of Mrs. Bellenden, except the impertinence of her stare, and her unexpected visit. Madame Fontarini had returned the visit upon a day other than the one named on Mrs. Bellenden's card, and within ten minutes of having seen Mrs. Bellenden driving in the Park. This species of snub, known only to women and diplomats, but perfectly understood by them, was quite intelligible to Mrs. Bellenden, but she did not so well understand the person with whom she was dealing. She classified Madame Fontarini as a woman accustomed to primitive social conditions, which Mrs. Bellenden thought prevailed in America, and as a person who could be intimidated. She would go again to the house in Queen's Gate, and take her chances of getting in.

Not once had she seen Fermor except to bow to him from her carriage, since their parting. Two or three times Tom Bellenden had asked her what had become of Fermor, and to this Mrs. Bellenden replied readily that she supposed Fermor was offended with her because she had spoken rather freely concerning Madame Fontarini, and it was said that Lord Castlemaine not only meant to sell King's Lyndon to Seymour at a high price, but to sell Fermor's rank as well.

" It seems to me," said Bellenden, in his slow fash-

ion, "it would be a good thing for Fermor to marry and go into public life. I noticed he has been restless for a long time. I am sorry, however, that you and he have fallen out."

It was on that same afternoon that Mrs. Bellenden determined to repeat her visit to Madame Fontarini. A number of carriages and motors were in the street, but there were other houses open besides Madame Fontarini's, and the season was coming down the home stretch.

The great doors opened at Mrs. Bellenden's approach, and she was invited, somewhat to her surprise, through the ground floor suite and into the great green garden beyond. It was very beautiful, as even a city garden may be when there is openness and space. Against the rose-red walls were rows of dwarf trees, gladiolus and oleanders in tubs, while great masses of azaleas and other splendid flowering plants made a riot of colour. In the midst of the green expanse of velvet turf stood Madame Fontarini and Seymour, receiving their guests.

Mrs. Bellenden realised at once that she was an uninvited guest, but the policy of rashness was hers. She advanced through the groups of gaily dressed women and more men than she had ever seen at a garden party before, to Theodora, and made an explanation.

"I came to pay you a visit," she said, smiling, "and I see you are having a party."

"I am very glad to see you," replied Theodora, but in her voice was that intonation which a woman's ear can always catch, and which means, "Don't do it again."

Seymour, however, with overflowing hospitality and kindness of heart assured Mrs. Bellenden of their great pleasure that she had happened in at this time, and no doubt a card had been sent her which she had not received.

Then, Mrs. Bellenden, smiling and full of sharp curiosity, glanced about her. The party was very distinguished, there was no question. The American Ambassador and Ambassadress were present, and other persons of the first fashion, but there were also persons who were more interesting than fashionable—Major Ashburton, for example.

Lord Castlemaine was in great form, and Lady Susan Battle, in a splendid purple satin gown and loaded with jewels, was majestically convoying Joshua Battle, who followed her at a respectful distance. Two of the Battle girls, Jane and Sarah, were in her wake, and Lady Susan had found it impossible to keep at a distance Wyndham, who was one of the first to arrive.

Miss Wyndham, having discovered that Mr. Battle was an M. P., had descended upon him in all the glory of her nineteen years, and a gorgeous gown, hat and parasol fresh from the Rue de la Paix, and was proceeding to discuss the Educational Bill with him.

Marsac and his wife were there, but Mrs. Bellenden had no mind to give Marsac another chance to repeat what she considered his insolence to her.

There was no sign of Fermor. Mrs. Bellenden, as an accidental guest, made her visit short. It has been said that no one knows pain who does not know jealousy. Mrs. Bellenden was familiar with that particular pain. She had the yearning of the primitive woman for luxury, money, clothes, establishments, and a retinue of servants. Here, everything was splendidly and perfectly done, as who could not do it well with unlimited wealth, such as Mrs. Bellenden thought all Americans possessed?

As she was about to make her adieux, Wyndham came up and spoke to her. He rather liked Mrs. Bellenden's striking and effective style. She seemed to him as primitive in her way as Seymour was in his. She lived an artificial life in a natural manner. Mrs. Bellenden was not averse to cultivating Americans at that moment, as she was eager to find out if possible something concerning her host and hostess. Therefore, she made another tour of the garden with Wyndham after having said her farewells. She was full of interest about Wyndham's profession, and frankly curious to know how he could afford to live in the way he did.

"That's easy enough," replied Wyndham, laughing. "You see, my father had a hand in what is called high finance. I never had the least interest in the subject. I was born with what is called

a nose for news. At the University I edited the student journal, and fought my way into journalism afterward. I like to find out things. Marsac, that agreeable French fellow, and I have it out about three times a week on the subject of journalism. He knows nothing about American journalism, and I know nothing about French journalism, so you may imagine we go round in a circle like a squirrel in a cage. But we are jolly good friends for all that."

"Are you finding out anything in England this time?" asked Mrs. Bellenden, turning full upon him her large blue eyes, and what was undoubtedly a dazzling smile.

"Yes, indeed," answered Wyndham. "I am trying to pick up the thread of a story that sounds like what you call a 'shilling shocker.' Do you know what a 'trusty' is?"

Mrs. Bellenden shook her head smilingly.

"Some strange American thing, I imagine," she said.

"I think they are common everywhere," replied Wyndham. "It was the Spaniards who found out this system. I daresay you think that the Spaniards never found out anything. Well, they had the best penal system as well as the best system of emancipation of slaves that the world ever saw, and they knew a hundred years ago that tuberculosis was a communicable disease. You see I've been travelling in Spain, trying to find out about the 'trusties.'

"But you haven't told me what a 'trusty' is?"

"It is a convict who has had a previous good record and the warden of the jail sends him out on errands. Of course, the man has to wear ordinary clothes; if he wore prison clothes he'd be jumped on the instant he got out of the jailyard. They very seldom violate their liberty because they are intelligent enough to know that it means another term in prison. But in the case of my 'trusty,' he did everything according to contrary. He was a model prisoner, who was serving a short term for manslaughter—hit a man and inadvertently killed him. Just before his term expired, he was sent one day to a little town two miles off. He disappeared and apparently the earth opened and swallowed him up. If a 'trusty' is fifteen minutes behind time his absence is known, and so the hue and cry was raised immediately. Now, it seems that friends of this man had been working for his pardon with the Governor of the State, and the pardon came just four hours after the man disappeared."

Wyndham had a peculiarly effective and dramatic way of telling things, and Mrs. Bellenden stood still at the foot of the stone steps that led into the garden, and leaned upon a marble vase to listen to him.

"He was caught in the end?" she asked.

"No, although he did the very thing of all others most likely to lead to his detection. At the end of a year a letter came from him somewhere in the West,

enclosing a sum of money in gold to the warden to be given to aid the discharged prisoners. Every year for twenty years this money has come, and of course it is impossible to trace gold pieces. For many years past the money has been sent from various countries in Europe. Then a vague rumour grew current in the State that this man had made a great pile of money. I became interested in the yarn, and concluded to turn myself into a discoverer, and find this man in Europe, as Stanley found Dr. Livingston in Africa. That is why I have been in Spain. The man is generally regarded as the most astute of escaped prisoners, but my theory is exactly the contrary. I think his achievement is altogether beyond that of the professional absconder, just as certain great lines are written, not by great poets, but by men who did the trick once, but knew not how they did it, and could not repeat it. I think that the man is entirely without art, and that his success in keeping out of the way is due to a stupendous fluke."

"How very interesting," murmured Mrs. Bellenden.

"You are the first person who said so," replied Wyndham, laughing. "I have the reputation of being the greatest bore in the profession on the strength of my Vidocq story, as I call it. The men in the club in New York swore to have me turned out if I mentioned the subject again. It is to get even with these fellows, as much as anything else,

that I want to produce the man and take him back in handcuffs to America. Every rich American of respectable appearance whom I meet in Europe I examine carefully to see if it is my man, but so far he has eluded me."

Wyndham felt so grateful to Mrs. Bellenden for listening to his pet story, that he accepted at once an invitation she gave him to call. As Mrs. Bellenden's carriage rolled away from Seymour's door, Lord Fermor entered it. This was not a pleasant sight for Mrs. Bellenden.

## CHAPTER IX

### King's Lyndon Tells Its Story

Two days after the garden party, Seymour and Theodora found themselves at King's Lyndon. On the first morning that Theodora awoke in the large airy bedroom with its two great windows looking over the beautiful but unkempt gardens, the green and rolling park, she felt in her heart a sensation of peace and rest, which she had scarcely known before in her life. Until her marriage she had ever felt restless in Europe, yearning to return to America, and having all those golden illusions which haunt the mind of a young girl concerning the native land that she had left when she was in the morning glow of childhood.

After her marriage there had been no peace or rest for Theodora, and among the things hardest for her to endure from Pietro Fontarini were the insults he lavished upon his wife's country and country-people.

In the first overwhelming years of her grief over the death of her child, places mattered nothing to her. Within the last year or two the desire to return to America had stirred strongly within her, but it was the one wish of hers that Seymour did not try to gratify. She had discovered in her

father, who had heretofore seemed unable to say nay to her, a fixed determination to remain in Europe. The determination seemed strange to Theodora, who with the eyes of a woman of thirty saw that Seymour had little sympathy with anything European; but Seymour for once declined to gratify a wish of Theodora's.

She herself being given to thinking, had discovered that there is an impassable gulf between the American and the monarchical view of everything from farcical comedies up to the highest theories of government. Not all her European education had been able to eradicate that innate haughtiness of republicanism which made her at eighteen unable to feel any sense of elevation when she was admitted into one of the oldest and greatest of Roman families. It was that, perhaps, which had made her see Pietro Fontarini in his true light at an age when a European girl would have accepted anything at its assessed value. Deep in Theodora's heart was a sharp sense of disappointment when she realised that her life must henceforth be spent in an alien land and among strangers who, however kind to her, would yet ever be strangers and aliens to her. True, she knew of no relations that she had in America, but it was one of her sweetest dreams that could she go there but once, she would find a family connection, people of her own blood, from whom she could claim that family kindness and intimacy which she had never known in her life. Now all this seemed

impossible, and Theodora thought, as she lay in her large canopied bed with faded red silk hangings, that renunciation of this dream of home, perhaps had brought her peace, as renunciation often brings. But she was not without dreams.

Later in the morning, when Theodora and her father walked about the house for the first time with a sense of proprietorship, she felt a just indignation against Lord Castlemaine. The picture gallery, a splendid and lofty apartment running the full length of the house, was absolutely bare. The story of how the Romneys and Gainsboroughs, and the entire accumulations of two hundred years, had been eaten and drunk and gambled away, on horses, cards and stocks, was one of the blackest marks against Lord Castlemaine. Seymour spoke of this to Theodora, as they stood together in the great despoiled gallery, which looked as if an army of Goths had camped there over night.

"This will be the most difficult part of the whole thing to restore," said Seymour. "I don't know anything about pictures, but I've seen enough of them in Europe to know that objects of art can't be bought like potatoes. What shall we do, my dear?"

Theodora shook her head.

"Let us go outside," she said, "and think about it."

Nature is stronger than even a vandal like Lord Castlemaine, and, like a cunning contriver, had turned even neglect to her own advantage. The

grass-grown terrace, the weather-stained statues, the green old Italian gardens lying in the stillness of a July noon, might have been the abode of the princess who lay sleeping for ever. There were many dovecotes about, and the doves stepped with a kind of timid boldness upon the balustrade of the terrace, and broke the silence with their soft cooing.

The house itself was a copy of the Little Trianon in white free-stone. At the back, which faced the gardens, was a long balustraded terrace of broken flags upon which the rooms on that side opened. The tall urns were empty and cracked, and a Naiad stood dry and forlorn in a marble basin in which no water swirled and danced. Below, stretched a noble vista of lawns with gardens on either side. At the foot of the lawns lay a piece of ornamental water, the colour of the wings of the doves that tripped watchfully on the terrace. At the farther end the columns of a small Greek temple shone against the tall, unkempt yew alleys, in which there was a dim, green darkness in the brightest noon. Upon the water, close to the edge, a group of water fowl, bent on grave business, moved meditatively back and forth.

The peace of the scene entered deeply into Theodora's soul. The place had been ravaged and then let alone. It bore a likeness to Theodora's fate. It could be restored to all its original beauty, the lovelier because of its mournful history. Theodora asked herself if such might not also happen to her

and was surprised to find a little wave of hope surging in her heart.

As far as the interior of the house was concerned, both Seymour and Theodora refrained from asking too many questions and looking too closely into things. The care-taker, who might also be called the housekeeper, was Reyburn, a tall, dark, silent woman who, Theodora speedily recognised, was by no means the usual type of prim English upper servant. Her husband, a shoemaker in the market town of Lyndon, was the founder and leader of a socialist club, which was a thorn in the flesh of both political parties and of the church as well as the state. The shoemaker had been paralysed in his lower limbs and plied his trade and preached his doctrines from a wheeled chair—the gift of Lord Fermor, as Reyburn herself promptly informed Theodora.

"My husband," she said as she showed Theodora over the ground floor, "is a sober, hard-working man, and makes a fair living, although the gentry and the townspeople are prejudiced against him on account of his being a socialist. But that never has made any difference with Lord Fermor, ma'am, and I must say, when Lady Susan Battle wanted Lord Castlemaine to discharge me because of my husband's club, his lordship refused to do it."

Theodora found that this usually reticent, elderly woman could talk freely enough about the two sub-

jects nearest her heart—her husband and Lord Fermor, who had been her nursling.

It was plain that Reyburn had a complete list in her mind of all Lord Castlemaine's misdoings, regarding his son and heir, and everything else, and revealed as much as she could within her limits. At every spot from which a piece of furniture, a picture, an ornament had been ravaged, she would mention:

"Lord Castlemaine sold this on such a date," or "His lordship removed this to Castlemaine House at such a time."

The inspection of the house took up the entire morning. When luncheon was over, Theodora walked up and down with her father on the long sunny terrace. Seymour liked his cigar in the open air, and it was Theodora's custom to walk with him while he smoked.

"It is a very knotty problem," he said, "what a man may do with certain household effects, with and without the consent of his heir, but I should judge that our friend, Lord Castlemaine, has pretty well looted his place, with or without the consent of Lord Fermor, and I should say that it was an infernal outrage."

"Imagine you looting a place in which I might be supposed to have some rights," said Theodora, slipping her arm through her father's and laying her cheek against his shoulder. "You would be much more likely to loot somebody's else place, and

supply me with what you thought I fancied. Thank Heaven, I have you, and not Lord Castlemaine, for my father."

"One thing is certain," continued Seymour, "this place can't be restored in a month or perhaps six months. There are a good many things on which I should like very much to have Lord Fermor's opinion. He probably knows how it was originally, but I hardly like to ask him, under the circumstances, to give me his assistance. It must be pretty hard lines for him to come here at all, and to see how he has been robbed of his patrimony."

"Yes," replied Theodora, "it must be hard."

She felt an inward conviction that Fermor had given up many things, not from weakness, for there was no indication of weakness about him, but in the beginning from inexperience, and in the end from the disinclination of a proud man to engage in a sordid controversy. She herself had given up much in trying to avoid sorded controversies with Pietro Fontarini.

When Seymour finished his cigar, he and Theodora made the complete tour of the park. Everything told the same story of neglect and wreckage. The park was completely forsaken, but luckily the price of timber being low, little of it had been felled, and it required more clearing up than planting. At every step the necessity for a reconstruction of the estate, as it were, became more obvious. The general aspect of things presented an appearance not

unlike that of Lord Castlemaine himself. They retained all the evidences of original beauty, but so battered and abused that it was plain they had been at war with circumstance.

It was quite tea time before Theodora and her father returned to the house. The question of a housekeeper was uppermost in Theodora's mind. The London housekeeper had been left behind to take care of the town house. Theodora and her father discussed the subject during their walk, and Theodora suggested that Reyburn be offered the post. It was evident that she was honest and intelligent and what little had been done to keep things together in the mansion was due to her efforts.

After tea, therefore, when Theodora went into the little morning room, which had been Lady Castlemaine's, she sent for Reyburn and offered her the place at good wages. Reyburn accepted with subdued eagerness. It was a personal triumph for her and a victory over Lady Susan Battle.

Next morning Theodora began in earnest to have her own and her father's rooms arranged before beginning the great work of rejuvenation, which would be put in the hands of capable men from London. The little morning room was shabby, but Theodora wisely determined to consider well before she made any changes. Her own pictures, ornaments and books she placed skilfully. There were a few pictures hanging on the walls, chiefly stained old engravings, and a sketch in water colour of a boy still

in dresses, holding a bird in a cage. It was stiff, affected, and amateurish in style, but there was something about it that indicated it to be a genuine likeness.

"Do you know who this is?" asked Theodora of Reyburn.

"That is Lord Fermor, Madam," replied Reyburn. "It was done by Lady Castlemaine herself. I think there is some writing on the back."

Theodora took the picture out of the frame and found written on the back:

"Reginald George John Lyndon, Lord Fermor, aged five and a half years. Painted by his devoted mother, B. Castlemaine."

Theodora put the picture back gently into the frame and placed it in the drawer of her desk, saying:

"I shall send this to Lord Fermor."

Reyburn's eyes, which were somewhat hard and set in expression, filled with tears. This silent, narrow and intense woman had a passionate affection for her nursling, and could not conceal it.

## CHAPTER X

### The Old, Old England

There are few things more interesting than the rehabilitation of a house and grounds, and when one's taste is good and money is plentiful, the difficulties and perplexities in the way only add to the pleasure. Seymour was delighted at the interest that Theodora showed in the work, and congratulated himself upon his purchase of King's Lyndon.

Everything was to be restored, even the great bare ballroom, with its rusty lustres, and moth-eaten curtains. The experts from London could show how everything should be done, but Theodora refused to give them a free hand, and saved the fine old house from becoming a mere museum. In vain were the names invoked of countesses and even duchesses who had allowed the decorators and restorers to work their will unchecked. Theodora calmly declared, with the characteristic American courage, that the house was designed to be lived in, and she wished to impress her own individuality upon it. The work, however, was speedily put in hand and progressed rapidly. Nevertheless, it would require at least six months before the restoration could be completed.

The neighbourhood was one of those common enough in the England of to-day, with splendid es-

tates, of which only half the houses were open. The cost of maintenance, the passion for travel on the part of their owners, kept them closed for all except a few months in the year. The people who were in the neighborhood all called upon Seymour and Theodora, and they were invited to the usual round of garden parties. Theodora's grace and affability were much admired by the men, but as the case is to-day in England, the women felt a secret and perfectly natural hostility to the American woman.

When they wished to compliment her, they told her they would never have taken her for an American.

This was quietly resented by Theodora, and made her adopt a gentle aloofness of manner which was not conducive to intimacy. But Theodora had learned to live much within herself and, besides, there were now many claims upon her time in her new surroundings, as Seymour habitually referred everything to her. Barotti came down twice every week to give her a violin lesson, and the present resources of the establishment enabled her to have Ashburton, Wyndham and the tall and lovely Dot and the Marsacs down for occasional week-ends. Every day seemed to bring Theodora nearer to peace and resignation.

The death of her child was still a poignant memory. In imagination she could see him at her side as she walked through the Italian gardens and the glades of the park, and she could almost feel his warm little hand in hers. But the sharp reflection

which had pierced her heart like a knife that this child had in him the blood of Petro Fontarini, with all its terrible chances, often recurred to her. If she could have felt the inward conviction of faith that her child was now in the happy fields of Paradise, and that she should see him again, she thought she could be reconciled to the separation, but Theodora's mind was of the sort which puts questions and demands answers. In her life she had suffered so much that she had but little time to think. Now, however, her brain, naturally active, was beginning to work. She asked herself if all that she had undergone were really an economic waste; if it were of design or whether it were the work of a vast, irresponsible, blundering, bungling Power, which took no thought of waste of energy, and which created passionate affections only to be frustrated; which implanted the splendid hope of immortality only to befool the helpless creatures of His making; which gave consciousness only to withdraw it, and made man merely to destroy him. Her own intelligence strongly denied this, and she longed to believe in design and ordered liberty. She began to cast about for a practical system of philosophy by which to live, and turned naturally to religion. The Church of England impressed her like a great building, half a cathedral and half a parliament house. The unquestioned supremacy of the State over the Church alarmed her, and the ruthlessness with which it was exercised shocked her. There was no Catho-

lic church nearer than Hillborough—eight miles away.

In all her miserable years in Italy, the only real impress the Catholic religion had made upon her was the presence of the Sacrament upon the altar. She had never entered the great basilicas or the humblest chapel without feeling herself in the actual Presence of the Lord; but with it came bitterness of soul because Christ, being there and seeing her, took no thought of her, either to teach her or comfort her.

Once, Ashburton, being at King's Lyndon, on Sunday morning did not appear until ten o'clock. He explained that he had risen early and taken the train to Hillborough in order that he might be present at the early mass, and had missed his train on returning. This was the first intimation Theodora had that Ashburton had become a Roman Catholic. It had a good effect upon her. Had Ashburton been a mystic, a dreamer, she would not have been half so much impressed. But he was the perfect type of a modern Englishman, hard-headed and practical, with a very real knowledge of the disadvantages of going counter to the religion of the state.

Ashburton was again at King's Lyndon for the week-end, as were also the Marsacs. Early, on the Sunday morning, a beautiful August sunrise, when the motor came to the door to take Marsac and Madame Marsac and Ashburton to Hillborough to mass, Theodora appeared, dressed to go with them.

"I think I should like to go," she said simply.

When they reached the little old town, all green and grey, and ivy-grown, they found the little church, also, green and grey and ivy-grown. Ashburton and the Marsacs went within, but Theodora remained in the churchyard instead. It was just eight o'clock, and the dewy freshness of the morning was upon the soft earth and the sombre yew trees of the churchyard.

Theodora remained walking about, and looking at the graves of the little children. She yearned to go within the church to see the Sanctuary lamp with its undying light before the door of the tabernacle. Still she shrank from it with an instinctive fear that she might be entering a path of difficulty and conflict. Too lately had she known anything like repose to wish to jeopardise it by any great and immediate change. As she stood hesitating, the rich light of the morning falling upon her slender black figure, the faint echo of the bell that announced the elevation of the Host, floated out in a wave of delicate music. It seemed to Theodora like some great cathedral bell thundering out in music its majestic call to prayer. Theodora's feet turned toward the door, and before she knew it she was on her knees in the dim little church. She made no prayer, but in her heart was a great reproach.

"Lord, Thou knowest I wish to believe, but Thou hast not given me belief. Thou gavest me my child only to take it away. Thou hast helped others; me, Thou hast not helped."

When all was over, and the congregation came out, Ashburton and Marsac and his wife were smiling and in good spirits. They seemed to have had increase of peace and happiness from their devotion. Only Theodora remained sad and abstracted.

Theodora sent to Fermor, with a graceful note, the little water colour of himself, made by his mother. In reply, she had a few lines full of gratitude, and a promise to call as soon as he returned to Longstaffe from London.

The death of the sitting member for the division of the county occurred during this month, and it was published in the London newspapers that Lord Fermor would stand for the seat. Seymour mentioned to Theodora that he understood the sale of King's Lyndon had very much lessened Fermor's interest with the landed people, but that in small places and especially in a large manufacturing town in the division, the labouring and working people were well inclined toward him, partly through the influence of Reyburn and his socialistic club.

"I hope Lord Fermor will succeed," said Seymour. "He represents a condition one sees all over Europe, of a man chained down by traditions and customs, from following his natural bent. He is getting his own way now when he is thirty-six years old. I should say that so far his life had been hard and disappointing."

Reyburn's passionate attachment to Fermor kept him continually before Theodora's mind. Reyburn

had a strange power of conveying much in a few words, and Theodora was readily able to gather from Reyburn's words a picture of the lonely and sensitive boy and his neglected mother living meagrely in the great house while Lord Castlemaine maintained state in London. Fermor had interested Theodora from the beginning, far more than she had ever supposed any man could, and she found herself listening to Reyburn with attention when Fermor's name came up in the matter of rehabilitating King's Lyndon.

Fermor was dividing his time between London and Longstaffe, ten miles away from King's Lyndon, and was as hard worked as a man could be, making his first contest for a parliamentary seat. Lord Castlemaine did not let him forget that Madame Fontarini would be, by long odds, the most advantageous person for him to marry, thus flatly going against the advice he had previously given Fermor. King's Lyndon, moreover, was a valuable factor in the district, and Theodora herself was charming. Fermor felt himself not unwilling for the marriage. He had the outlook of an Englishman of his class, but he realised that Madame Fontarini would require more courtship than the heir to an earldom is usually required to make. He felt a strong desire to see Theodora, and one afternoon in July drove over to King's Lyndon. No one was at home, but Reyburn, delighted to see him, insisted upon giving him tea before he returned. A

slight rain gave her an excuse to serve the tea in the little yellow morning room which had been Lady Castlemaine's. It still retained not only many memories for Fermor, but many objects which he recognised. Reyburn, who, like all women from the scullion to the princess, was a promoter of marriages, had heard it hinted that a marriage might be arranged between Fermor and Madame Fontarni, and she proceeded to give the plan some efficient help.

She was full of praise of Theodora and her father, and the sly suggestiveness of her talk made Fermor smile.

After half an hour, he took the road again, his mind somewhat occupied with Theodora. She was certainly the antipodes of Flora Bellenden, and that was in itself a powerful recommendation. Thank God, he was delivered from the body of that death, and like all men in the same circumstances, wondered how he had endured it so long, and was amazed at his own fault and folly. Mrs. Bellenden had at least realised that Fermor would hold no further communication with her, as he steadily declined to answer her letter, and she no longer molested him. He would tell any woman he might marry, about Mrs. Bellenden, but it was an ugly story to put in words, and, Fermor surmised, would be uglier to an American than an Englishwoman.

Seymour went up to London once during the month and saw Lord Castlemaine, who skilfully sug-

gested a marriage between Fermor and Theodora. Seymour was somewhat startled, but he told Lord Castlemaine it was his wish to see Theodora "happily married," as he put it, considering that in the event of his death she would be utterly alone in the world.

On his return from London, Seymour made some guarded allusion to what Lord Castlemaine had said, adding apologetically:

"You know, my dear child, things are differently arranged over here, from what they are in America, and when money and rank are considered, they are frankly estimated."

Theodora laughed a little and made some daughter's joke with her father upon his anxiety to be rid of her, but Seymour felt amazed by the fact that she was not offended at the suggestion.

Theodora studied the subject from that point of ingenious self-deception which every woman can command. She succeeded in persuading herself that if Lord Fermor should propose, it would be a judicious marriage for both of them. They were no longer boy and girl; they could understand the marriage of sympathy, friendship, respect; there was no occasion for either pretending to be in love with the other. The one fact which she steadily ignored was that, from the first meeting with Fermor, she had found herself thinking of him with an astonishing frequency.

## CHAPTER XI

### What Dreams Will Come

These things were passing through Theodora's mind, when one morning in August, to escape the army of workmen that swarmed over the house and gardens, she walked to the farthest end of the park.

The morning was shadowed, rather than overcast, by a silvery mist, which hid the groups of gnarled oak and beech trees like a muslin veil, and lent a soft coolness to the air as it touched Theodora's delicate cheeks, to which a girlish bloom was returning. She had walked almost to the edge of the park near the highroad when the mist suddenly turned to a hard shower. Theodora, taking up her skirts, ran toward a niche with a stone bench in the solid wall of cedars which marked the boundaries of the park. Over this niche a great Norwegian fir extended its arms like a canopy.

Just as Theodora gained the refuge, she heard the galloping of a horse's hoofs. The next moment a horseman trotted under the fir tree, and Fermor dismounted and threw the reins over a branch. Then, turning toward the stone bench, which was barely large enough for two, he saw Theodora sitting in one corner of it, smiling and secure from the rain.

Fermor came and sat down in the vacant place. They were so close together that they could study each other as never before. It was the first time Theodora had seen Fermor in riding-dress, and he looked well in it, and younger and fresher, more boylike, than she had supposed possible. Fermor noticed the same rejuvenation in Theodora. Her month in the country had given her a new freshness. The dampness had somewhat dishevelled her hair, but its graceful disorder added to the youthfulness of her appearance.

"I was on my way to see you and Mr. Seymour," said Fermor, "when the shower caught me. I remembered this refuge, and have sat here many hundreds of times in the days when I was a little boy."

"It must be very hard," said Theodora, "to see strangers, even though they are friends, in one's old home. I have felt that very much since we have been at King's Lyndon."

"It isn't half so hard as to see the place going to rack and ruin," replied Fermor cheerfully. "Besides, we English are now being infected with some of your American ideas. We are beginning to live in the present. I have been so much taken up with political concerns for the last few weeks that I have not been able to give much thought to other affairs."

"What are your prospects?" asked Theodora, smiling.

"Ask the committee," replied Fermor, laughing.

"I am under instructions to promise everything to everybody and to take the most optimistic view of my own prospects. I have, however, a valuable and unexpected helper in Ashburton. He is very strong with the socialistic element, and I hope through him they may be brought to tolerate me."

"You have a very earnest supporter in Reyburn," said Theodora. "I am keeping her on as housekeeper, and I have discovered that there is but one correct way to do anything, and that is as Lady Castlemaine did it, and as you have approved from the time you were ten years old."

"It is a great thing to have even one human being devoted to one. Reyburn, I reckon to be my best and earliest friend among women. I am glad to hear you like her. She is a faithful creature. Do you like the place as well as you expected?"

"Quite as much," answered Theodora. "Sometimes I have the feeling that the people who once lived here are the real people, and we are but the shadows, the unrealities, but that, I suppose, is the feeling that comes to everyone who lives in a place like King's Lyndon."

They continued talking for a few minutes, when Fermor inadvertently spoke of Rome. He cursed himself for his want of tact when he saw the change which came over Theodora's face. But she surprised him and herself by saying:

"I try to think of Rome as seldom as I can. Perhaps you have heard something of the terrible

sorrows I experienced there! All the beauty of Italy speaks to me only of sorrow.

"I often saw you in Rome," said Fermor quietly.

Theodora turned two startled eyes on him.

"In the Borghese Gardens; sometimes the old man, Cardinal Fontarini, was with you. You wore deep mourning and were thin and pale and sad. The change in you is very great. I hope it will be greater as time goes on."

"I had no hope at all when we came to England," replied Theodora in a low voice, "but since then, time, and the desire to please my father, have given me a little hope. I hope for peace, even if I have no happiness in life. For I assure you," she continued, turning full upon Fermor, "I had no happiness in my marriage, for so much as one week, nor, as much as I loved my child, did I have much happiness in him. I could be tortured through him, and I was tortured through him by Pietro Fontarini."

As she spoke her husband's name, the fire of resentment burned in her eyes, and echoed in her low voice. She hated the memory of Pietro Fontarini as she had hated and despised the man after knowing him. This hatred came out in spite of herself, for she recollected at once that she was speaking to a comparative stranger, and stopped suddenly.

Fermor listened to this with approval. He had no fancy for being any woman's second love, and for feeling that there were secret memories and tender

recollections in her heart which he of all men should least know, things to be unspoken between them, secrets to be sedulously guarded from him. Then he said to Theodora boldly:

"Can any normal woman marry a man she does not love?"

"Yes," answered Theodora with prompt directness. "What can an inexperienced girl of eighteen know of love? Would you call the mere fancy of a sentimental girl for a handsome face, a graceful carriage, by the name of love? It is no more love than the fancy for a picture, or a statue, or anything else which a girl may idealise. In my case, it was a man. My father, for some reason which I do not now understand, was eager for the marriage. I had no one to advise me, to hold me back. The Fontarinis, all of them, tried to bring about the marriage. I look back on myself with the deepest pity."

The white rain was still coming down in sheets, and Theodora's sudden confidences concerning the tragedy of her life, made in a solitude almost as complete as if they were alone in a world all their own, touched Fermor deeply. He said a few words full of meaning to her, and she, with ready understanding, comprehended. A deep blush flooded her face as she listened to him. It was not exactly a lover's pleading. Fermor was too sincere a man to profess more than he felt, and least of all to a woman of great wealth. But it was the offer of fidel-

ity, of honour, of all that had been lacking in Pietro Fontarini. Something was lacking, too, in Fermor's offer—the deep affection for which Theodora yearned, and of which she felt herself capable. But something was there which was the last thing on earth to be expected and which was exactly opposed to outward appearances. This was disinterestedness. True it was, Fermor could not afford to marry without money, but he was as little likely to marry for money as any man living.

He did not press Theodora for an answer then, asking her only to take it into consideration. This Theodora promised, and would promise no more than that, but deep in her heart was the conviction that here lay her one chance for happiness.

They had sat nearly a full hour in the little refuge before the rain ceased and the sun came out upon a world all green and gold and diamond-studded.

"It was a fateful rain for me," said Fermor, smiling, as they picked their way across the park toward the house, Fermor leading his horse. "I should not have had the courage to speak so soon but for the chance of seeing you so unexpectedly alone, and for what you told me."

"Remember," said Theodora with soft positiveness, "not a word of this is to be said to anyone, least of all my father. He must hear it from me."

Fermor was somewhat aghast at this. He had expected to have an interview with Seymour directly after luncheon, but wisely concluded that American

methods were slightly different from English ones, and thought it best to agree to Theodora's scheme.

Seymour met them on the terrace.

"I have been anxious about you," he said to Theodora. "I would have sent the carriage for you if I had known where you were, but I thought it likely you had taken refuge in the village."

"I was quite safe, papa," answered Theodora, smiling. "Lord Fermor and I sat in the little refuge in the cedar hedge by the lower lodge, and were perfectly sheltered from the rain."

Fermor, accustomed to the ways of his own countrywomen, was not a little surprised and even piqued at the calmness with which Theodora took what seemed to him the all-important event in a woman's life. This was increased by Theodora's smiling self-possession at the luncheon table. It was as if she had put out of her mind completely, if not entirely forgotten, the fact that she had been invited to become one day Countess of Castlemaine. But Fermor's native good sense, and good taste and touch of humour, were all engaged by this novel reception of his proposal. He had supposed that when a man made an offer to a woman, it was clearly within his rights to demand an instant reply, and Theodora's cool postponement of a decision seemed to establish the truth of what he had heard—that according to the American plan, a man had no rights that a woman is bound to respect. But the mere fillip to his pride gave an unusual interest to the

situation. He realised that Theodora, if she married him, would not do so for his title, just as Theodora, with her sharp woman's instinct, had perceived that Fermor was not selling himself at a price.

Anythng more unembarrassed than Theodora was, could not be imagined when her father and Fermor were smoking together on the terrace after luncheon. It appealed to Fermor's latent sense of humour, and he was secretly laughing at himself in the novel and totally unexpected position in which he found himself—a probationer, as it were, upon Madame Fontarini's pleasure, without even the privilege of speaking to her father on the subject. He had never heard of such an instance before, and the novelty of it added zest to the situation.

There was always in Theodora something soft and appealing. She did not take men by storm, as the tall black-eyed Wyndham girl did, but in this dove-like Theodora, now appeared that quiet sense of humour, the birthright of every American, and a calmness which made any other method of acting seem ridiculous.

Fermor was on his mettle and showed the same composure as Theodora did, ignoring any change in their relations. He discussed his election prospects with Seymour, and spoke of expecting considerable help from Ashburton, who was strong with the various socialist clubs which flourished in all of the big market towns of the district. His predecessor had been elected by a decreased majority

due to these radical votes, which slightly but steadily increased, and had been abused by both of the great parties. This radical vote, which was made up chiefly of the workers in shops, and the class of poorly paid, but skilled mechanics, would listen to Ashburton, who took much interest in the political status of the working classes.

"My adversary," continued Fermor, smiling, "has one great advantage over me, a charming wife and two pretty daughters who will work and speak for him."

"That is one thing I do not like in your British elections," said Seymour, "the sight of women on the platform. I should very much dislike to see my daughter in such a position."

"As I understand," remarked Theodora, "that the most sensible English women in electioneering, content themselves with dressing well, and looking charming, and praising their husbands or fathers or brothers for whom they are appearing, I should not think intelligent voters would be much impressed by that sort of thing."

Every word Theodora uttered showed to Fermor's observing mind that her ideas and ideals were totally different from those of an Englishwoman, and these ideas and ideals had for him the charm of the unknown.

When he rose to go the only allusion he made to the marked event of their meeting in the park, was to say on shaking hands with Theodora:

"I shall be in this neighbourhood two weeks from to-day, and perhaps you will allow me the privilege of calling again?"

"Certainly," answered Theodora, and Seymour with ready hospitality added:

"Come and dine with us, we shall like to know how things are going in the division."

Fermor thanked him, without accepting or declining the invitation, which he thought might be most acceptable or exactly the contrary, according to the answer he got from Theodora.

Seymour went with him down the stone steps of the terrace into the courtyard beyond, where Fermor's horse had been brought. As the two men left the terrace, Theodora went upstairs with her quick, silent step to a great window in her bedroom from which she could see anyone going down the avenue of horse chestnuts to the highroad.

Fermor started out at a sharp canter, riding well, and looking as a true horseman should, as if the man and horse were one. In a few minutes he disappeared under the shade of the trees, but there was a point where the avenue ceased and the park opened into a wide champaign. Theodora stood at the window until she saw the distant figure of the horseman come out upon this plateau. The afternoon was radiant, and Fermor's figure was silhouetted against the green fields and unclouded blue of the sky. His horse was walking slowly along, the reins upon his neck. This was at a point where

a fine view of the stately house and spacious gardens could be had, and visitors were usually halted there to get this splendid vista.

"If he is thinking of me," said Theodora to herself, with the ingenuity of a woman's mind, "he will ride on without looking at the place, but if he is thinking of once more being master of King's Lyndon, he will stop his horse and look back at the house."

But Fermor did not stop and look back; he trotted off rapidly out of sight.

Theodora, still standing at the window, sighed, but did not smile at herself. The sigh was for her lost girlhood, for the true dream of love, which she had never known. She was a woman of thirty, and had passed through the stress and storm. The romantic instincts of a girl still haunted her imagination, but she could not speak of them. She could not tell Fermor what a girl, smiling and blushing, would tell her lover. The proposed marriage was all a cool, sensible arrangement—that is, on Fermor's part, and it must appear so on hers. Deep in her heart, though, was a secret fancy for Fermor. Like all women, she expected to live her own love story. She admired Fermor and recognised his vigour of mind and character, and relished the idea of depending upon it. Her father was the most unsophisticated of men; she often wondered how a man with so little knowledge of the world could have made and even kept a fortune. He had often said to her:

"I made my money by a lucky hit, and I keep it by not trying to be a financier, but a conservative investor."

Seymour was full of praises of Fermor at tea time. Theodora listened silently.

After tea, in the cool, bright summer afternoon, they went to walk. Theodora led her father to the little refuge under the Norwegian fir tree. When they were together in that green solitude, she put her hand in his and told him what Fermor had said to her.

"Papa," she said, fixing her dark and serious eyes upon him, "here is the strange, the comforting, thing; Lord Fermor would not be marrying me for money—or rather, for money alone. I can't tell you how I know this. Of course he needs money, but he would not sell himself. You may call this vanity, but it is not, it is the truth."

Seymour caught his daughter to his heart.

"I believe it," he said. "How could any man keep from loving you? I believe even that scoundrel, Pietro Fontarini, was in love with you after his scoundrelly fashion, but this man——! My dearest, it is the best thing that could happen. Ashburton thinks highly of him, and Ashburton's word about a man may be taken."

"Are you anxious to be rid of me, papa?" asked Theodora. It is the question which a fond daughter asks of an adoring father.

"Yes," answered Seymour, with a strange solemnity. "I am anxious to see you with a man's

strong arm between you and the world, anxious to feel that if I were not with you, there would be another and a better man——"

Theodora put her hand over her father's lips.

"Hush!" she cried. "Neither you nor anyone else shall ever say such a thing as that. You are the best man that ever lived. If Lord Fermor is only half as good—but no, he can't be. I must make up my mind, if I marry him, to find him not so kind, not so self-sacrificing as you, nor can he ever come between us, or ever make it so that I can't come to you if you need me."

All at once in this first moment that the thought of a separation came to Theodora, the recollection of her father's unceasing devotion, watchfulness, and passionate affection overwhelmed her. The large bright tears rolled down her cheeks as she said brokenly:

"When I think of what you have been to me from the time I can first remember until this moment, it seems as if no daughter ever had such a father."

Seymour kissed her silently, the passion of fatherhood speaking in his face as the devotion of filial love shone in Theodora's eyes. Father and daughter walked back through the purple twilight, Seymour's arm within Theodora's. They always fell into those attitudes in which Theodora seemed protecting the gentle old man.

## CHAPTER XII

### Visitors at King's Lyndon

On the following Saturday, Ashburton, with Wyndham and his sister, came to King's Lyndon for the week-end.

Fermor's visit was mentioned, and Ashburton, in spite of Seymour's reticence concerning the object of it, surmised its meaning. The proposed marriage was hinted in many quarters despite Lady Susan Battle's fierce pronunciamento that no person connected with the Castlemaine family would condescend to an American alliance. Ashburton was full of Fermor's election prospects, which he hoped would result in benefit to the labouring classes, of whom the late incumbent had been peculiarly forgetful. It seemed to Ashburton as if Fermor's rehabilitation would be complete if he was married to a sweet and intelligent woman, and engaged in a useful public life.

On the Sunday morning, Ashburton went to the little church at Hillborough by train, and returned. Theodora made no offer to go with him and he thought she had probably acted on a mere impulse in going on the previous Sunday.

In the afternoon Jack Thornycroft, who dogged the footsteps of Dot Wyndham, appeared for tea

with a plausible story of being on a visit to a great aunt in the neighbourhood. He made every effort to beguile Dot into a walk in the park alone with him, but that young person, with cool disregard of the sentimental advances of the eldest son of a baronet, insisted in attaching both him and herself to the whole party at King's Lyndon for a stroll after tea. In going through the village they passed Reyburn's cottage. In the garden Reyburn sat in his wheeled chair under a great oak tree with his congregation of socialists surrounding him, while he expounded his notions of government. He spoke with great civility to Seymour and Ashburton, and answered politely Theodora's inquiries about his health.

"I should like very much," said Seymour to Reyburn, "to hear what you have to say on government and religion. Would you let me have a place on this bench?"

"A young workingman rose at once and offered Seymour his place. Then, Theodora said smiling:

"Perhaps you would let us all stay too."

With much politeness, the whole party was accommodated with seats. Of the newcomers Theodora was perhaps the one most distrusted by the assemblage of thirty or forty clerks and shopkeepers and mechanics gathered under the great, spreading oak tree. They were accustomed to seeing the wives and daughters of the aristocracy coming among them and beguiling them, so Reyburn taught, of their votes. They had no idea of Seymour's po-

litical affiliations, and being, as they supposed, fabulously rich, they regarded him as a concealed enemy. Wyndham and his sister, they observed with keen curiosity, as Americans, and possibly in sympathy with them.

Reyburn then continued his address. It was upon the old, old subject of the rights of man, and was a free adaptation of what he had read of Camille Des Moulins and Danton. He had no understanding of Jefferson and Franklin. Paine's "Age of Reason" appeared to Reyburn to be a new dispensation. Nevertheless, his thinking and reading were enough for him to present his case effectively.

When Reyburn had spoken for twenty mniutes, Ashburton asked the privilege of making a short reply. This Reyburn courteously agreed to and Ashburton was listened to with respectful attention. He pointed out the dangers of dealing radically with old-established things, overlaid by the traditions of a thousand years, declaring himself a radical in mind, but a conservative in action. What Ashburton said was full of pith and the sublime common sense which distinguished him, but there was in it nothing to captivate the imaginations of men who had been pondering upon the great words of liberty, enlightenment, republicanism.

Wyndham, his black eyes flashing, followed both the discourses attentively. When Ashburton concluded and sat down, Reyburn, looking toward Wyndham, said:

"Perhaps the gentleman from America will say something to us?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Wyndham, rising. "Do you want me to tell you the truth or a pack of agreeable and diversified lies?"

"The truth, if you please," said Reyburn gravely.

"Very well then," continued Wyndham. "I have sat here as an American listening to what has been said. There was an American writer who said of the English people sixty years ago that they were still playing with toys with which we have finished. It is as true to-day as it was then. You don't need to get rid of property or to distribute it, or to abolish your army and navy, or anything of the sort. All you have to do is to abolish titles and hereditary honours and privileges. Rank is a very real thing, even although it does not carry with it a seat in the House of Lords. It means caste, which is a fixed quantity, and very different from class, which is a movable quantity. It is just the difference between a fortress and a camp. Caste is a fortress and class is a camp. Monarchy, you know, is a primitive institution, and when you reach the point when you have a constitutional monarchy and put your king under bonds to behave himself, you admit the fact that you could do without him perfectly well. There is no more real basis for a man's inheriting political power than ecclesiastical power. To be consistent, the son of the Archbishop of Can-

terbury ought to be Archbishop of Canterbury as soon as his father dies, and the daughters of Field Marshal Lord Roberts, who are to inherit his title, ought also to be field marshal. Monarchy, seen from the republican point of view, is a grotesque object. You had for sixty-two years an illustrious lady as queen, who, in her own person, redeemed the whole thing from ridicule. Now, the question in every country in Europe is, 'How long will monarchy of any sort last, no matter how sugar-coated it is?'

"In England it will last a good while yet; first, because you have a government exactly suited to your needs, and which is very well administered; secondly, because the rights of life and property are very well protected here; and thirdly, because you don't know what liberty is."

At that a rustle went round among the assemblage and a young clerk with a thoughtful face, rose and said:

"Wherever the British flag floated, every man was free long before Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves in America."

"True, my friend," answered Wyndham. "One doesn't obtain liberty at a bound, nor is it attained without the shedding of oceans of blood. Don't forget that. But I tell you, liberty is cheap at any price. I know that many defects still exist in the operation of our system in America. Our development has been so much more rapid than the world

has ever seen before, that great forces have come into being faster than means of controlling them have been created. But the means of controlling everything lies in the hands of the people, and affairs can be remedied just as fast and just in the way the people choose. Here in England you have a way of saying that you are more democratic than we are in America. Now, in China, the law is more rigidly administered than in England. The closer the people are packed in a country, the more they are forced to respect each other's rights. In China, when a bank fails, all the officers of it are immediately executed. There has not been a bank failure in China for six hundred years. The margin upon which soul and body can be kept together in China is so narrow, that the failure of a bank means death to thousands of people. In England, if a bank fails, it means a terrible catastrophe, want and penury to thousands. If a bank fails in America, it means that a lot of people who did nothing before, have to go to work, that's all. The consequence is, that money is not the sacred thing in America that it is in England, and in England it is not the matter of life and death that it is in China.

"As for what my friend Ashburton tells you about being slow in repairing this old machine of yours, don't believe a word of it. Major Ashburton is a first-class fellow, and except that he doesn't understand American jokes, I have no fault to find with

him, but there is no way of repairing an old worn-out machine like monarchy. As Tom Macaulay said: 'There is no way of preparing people for freedom.' Some very level-headed English public men now talk about abolishing the House of Lords. Now, when you have abolished the House of Lords, you have got to abolish the State Church, and the King—God bless him! Nice man, King Edward is. He would make a fine President. I was presented to him last week. He has a fine eye, and is the son of his mother. Magnificent old lady, Queen Victoria was. Greatest woman of the age. I backed out of the King's presence with the highest respect for him as a gentleman, and wondered how he could go through the thing without grinning, but he looked as sober as a judge. The old monarchical machine will go on for a while yet. Some day it will fall with a crash, just like a lot of other monarchies in Europe.

"Meanwhile don't claim any liberty in England as long as you require the housemaid to state her religion before you engage her, and allow a gentleman to legislate for you, because he had an ancestress who had not a rag of character, and became the mistress of a king. Be satisfied with what you have, good government, religious toleration and heavy taxes. When you acquire the germ of liberty, you will be astonished at the vast number of things you will have to get rid of in this pleasant old England."

There was a silence as Wyndham sat down, and Ashburton stroked his moustache in meditative triumph. Reyburn politely thanked Wyndham for his remarks and the party from King's Lyndon moved on.

"You haven't done me any harm in the eyes of my friends," said Ashburton, smiling. "When you told them they did not know what liberty was, you wounded their self-love, and that was enough."

"So I thought at the time," replied Wyndham, laughing, "but when I speak as an American journalist I am the apostle of abstract truth. Abstract truth is highly rarefied, you know, and the human subject does not thrive on it—can't stand much of it, in fact. All truth has to be modified to make it bearable; but by degrees people climb up from the swamps and marshes of monarchy to the heights of republicanism where the air is relatively pure."

Then Ashburton began speaking of Fermor's candidacy, saying Fermor was likely to be useful in Parliament.

"There is an instance," said Wyndham, "of a man being held in bondage by his caste. That man, you say, has a great aptitude and natural fitness for political life, yet he passed fifteen of his best years as a Guardsman because his father, his grandfather, and his great grandfather, and I don't know how many greats back, had done the same thing. He had as little freedom to follow his natural bent as this man Reyburn has, who

ought to have been a lawyer and an advocate, and is a shoemaker."

The discussion kept on good-naturedly during the whole walk. It is not to be supposed that Miss Wyndham remained quiet while the talk was in progress. She interjected various remarks of a penetrating, if somewhat crude nature, accompanied by a dazzling smile and much graceful gesticulation with an ivory-handled lace parasol.

Theodora said little, although she listened with interest. The circumstances of her life had directed her attention more to the moral aspect of life than to questions affecting concrete things. She was more interested in the liberty of the soul than the social condition of the individual. One additional idea she had gained, and that was a new view of the responsibility of money. Heretofore, she had only thought of it in its primitive conception, that all rich people ought to give money to the poor. Wyndham agreed with Ashburton that gifts might rob a man of his self-respect. This had not occurred to Theodora until then. She thought that by the exercise of tact and delicacy, a gift could be made in some way to almost anyone. Then she pondered over Wyndham's saying that in Europe people begin at the wrong end of economic things, by withholding a living wage and giving a pension instead.

She asked some questions so intelligently that Wyndham earnestly advised Ashburton to secure Theodora's services on the platform for Fermor.

The house guests left on the Monday morning, and Theodora resumed her life of quiet reflection. Outwardly, there was much to do, to think of, and to decide, and the mansion resounded with noise of workmen all day. But there was nothing of a disturbing nature. Not only Theodora but her father was thinking about the future. Like all women, Theodora studied her own heart closely, and she at once realised that Fermor had a powerful and growing attraction for her. He was ever in her mind, not in his aspect of rank, because to marry him would be no real elevation to Madame Fontarini. Her personality, her fortune, gave her entrance anywhere, and, as in her first marriage to Pietro Fontarini, she would lose, rather than gain. As an American, she was in principle and in effect the equal of any person whatever in rank, although not in precedence. When she entered the Fontarini family, one of the greatest in Rome, she acquired a certain precedence of some, and subordination to others. This would be the effect of her becoming Lady Fermor, and eventually Countess of Castlemaine. But this gave Theodora no concern. She had inherited in an extraordinary degree the American sense of perfect equality with the highest, and her foreign education and marriage had served to accentuate, rather than modify, this.

All women act upon much they cannot formulate. So did Theodora, and when the time came that she must ask herself where she belonged in the social

order, it was already settled in advance. She gave, therefore, no thought to the question of rank with which the world credited her. So, by the same singular contradiction, Fermor was but slightly influenced by Madame Fontarini's millions, and the exchange of rank for money had but a shadowy existence in the mind of either Theodora or Fermor. The one real appeal which Theodora's money made to Fermor was that it would be agreeable to live once more at King's Lyndon, for which he had a secret and sentimental attachment. But to live at King's Lyndon with a wrangling wife, or with Flora Bellenden—Fermor felt a wholesome disgust at the idea. Theodora pleased his taste, and she had that indefinable difference, that attraction of novelty, which has made so many international marriages for American women. He could safely predict what an Englishwoman would say and do under given circumstances, but he could never predict what Theodora would, except that it would be in good taste. He had the old-fashioned English conception of the wife, a woman who would look well at the head of his table. This conception, it will be noted, merely referred to the woman's looks, and not to her conversation, but Fermor was modern enough to admit that the time had come when conversation counted for something.

He was very keen concerning his election, and proved an excellent campaigner. His constituents were surprised and pleased at his knowledge and his

mastery of party affairs. He even proved himself an effective speaker, though always brief and somewhat caustic.

Ashburton addressed many meetings in the large manufacturing towns and was listened to with respect, if not approval. The fact, however, that he was a Roman Catholic was against him. The old saying that the Roman Catholics in England were made up of the highest and the lowest, applied exactly to the division of Midlandshire. The voters made far less objection to the old Roman Catholic families than to converts like Ashburton. The English mind dislikes the idea of change, which it generally confounds with revolution, and thereby forces those who would be satisfied with gradual changes into becoming revolutionists. Ashburton was the soul of conservatism, but the fact that he had changed his religion gave him the popular character of an iconoclast. Reyburn was very ardent in Fermor's cause, but his advocacy was of doubtful advantage.

On the evening preceding the day when Fermor had said he would return for his answer, Theodora, for the first time in the two weeks, broke her silence with her father on the subject as they sat on the terrace in the summer moonlight. She felt herself blushing like a girl when she said to Seymour:

"To-morrow, you remember, Lord Fermor comes for his answer."

"Do you think I could forget it?" asked Sey-

mour. "When a father is considering the marriage of an only child, the best of daughters, it is not likely to be out of his mind for very long. I have been praying and hoping that you will accept Lord Fermor, but I haven't dared to say one word."

"I shall accept Lord Fermor," said Theodora in a low voice. Seymour raised her tenderly.

"You don't know what it is to me," he said with a curious ring of pathos in his voice, "to feel that you will be safe with a man's strong arm between you and the world. Money, such as you have, and as I shall give you, is no safeguard. It is only an additional danger. But for that money, you would have been saved from Pietro Fontarini. I have great confidence in Lord Fermor, and I believe at last the great happiness which you deserve is beginning."

Like the true American father, it had never entered into Seymour's mind that his daughter had not aroused the most passionate attachment in Lord Fermor, or that he would not be as considerate of her wishes as an American man would be.

The father and daughter sat long upon the terrace talking together with that unbroken confidence which had ever been maintained between them, and when Theodora said good-night and went to her room, Seymour suspected that her heart was more deeply involved than she was willing to admit. The thought gave him profound satisfaction and comfort.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Sunrise

The next morning's post brought Theodora a note from Fermor. He was coming from London and would reach King's Lyndon at five o'clock, to remain an hour, if she would not allow him to stay longer. The composition of this note gave Fermor much grim concern. The situation was quite unprecedented. He had known of postponed engagements, but never of a case when the lady kept the gentleman, and an heir to an earldom besides, two weeks in suspense. It was from the British point of view an infringement of the gentleman's rights. But, as Fermor thought with a smile, everything he had ever seen about American women was without precedent. One of the pleasures he anticipated, in case the marriage came off, was telling Lady Susan Battle of being hung up in the air like Mahomet's coffin, for two weeks, not knowing whether he were a *fiancé* or not, himself bound by every obligation, while the lady remained perfectly and entirely free.

Theodora would have wished to see Fermor in the very spot where he had proposed marriage to her, but as he had touched but lightly on sentiment in his words to her, pride forbade her. She chose for their rendezvous the quaint old temple with its stained

marble columns by the side of the lake. It was quiet, but not secluded, and therefore not the place for a love scene.

The August afternoon was blue and bright, and the gardens, which had resumed their splendid and ordered beauty, as a princess resumes her robes of state, were at last quiet and clear of working people. The lake lay cool and still and shimmering with gold and silver, and the velvet lawns spread out, darkly green in the glow and glory of the afternoon sun.

Toward five o'clock, Theodora walked across the lawn to the temple, carrying for form's sake a book in her hand. She had picked it up at random, and did not look at it until she had reached the temple. Then she blushed to find it a volume of Shelley. She thought there was still time to carry it back to the house, and she sped, with her peculiarly light and graceful step, toward the yew alley, which was the shortest way to the house. Just as she entered the green solitude, she came face to face with Fermor.

"I am a little early," he said, smiling, "but a man coming upon my errand, generally is, or ought to be, early."

Theodora, in her surprise and confusion, dropped the book, and Fermor picked it up, and without noticing the title, put it in his pocket.

Theodora made no reply, but a delicate colour replaced the usual soft, clear pallor of her cheeks. This pleased Fermor. He hated a woman without senti-

ment, and was touched by Theodora's silence, which was plainly the silence of controlled emotion. Without speaking, they walked between the dark-green walls on either side of them, not toward the temple, but toward the greater seclusion of the alley. A stray gleam of sunshine fell upon Theodora, revealing the milky whiteness of her skin, against the extreme darkness of her hair and eyes, and the slimness of her figure in her white gown, with a thin, white scarf floating from her shoulder. She was not strictly beautiful, but Fermor thought he had never seen a woman so exquisitely natural, or who suggested beauty and grace so much as this slim black-eyed woman. He knew her age perfectly well, but as she suggested beauty, so she suggested youth, in her girlish figure, and the frank simplicity of her expression and voice.

When they neared the end of the alley, and could see plainly the wide, bright expanse of the lake shimmering in the splendour of the August sun, Fermor laid a light but detaining hand upon the filmy white scarf which half enveloped Theodora's slight figure.

"You will let me remain, will not you not?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Theodora after a pause, in a low and composed voice.

Fermor took her hand and kissed it, saying gently: "I shall hope to make you happier than you have yet been."

If he had made protestations of love, Theodora's distrust would have been instantly aroused. She respected him the more for his reserve, but her woman's instinct revealed to her that Fermor felt more than he expressed. There was an open admiration in his eye, a note of tenderness in his voice that said far more than his guarded words. He was, in truth, more interested in Theodora than he was prepared to avow, and looked keenly at her to discover if what he said had moved or agitated her. He saw a deep flush, like a girl's blush, suddenly flood her pale cheeks, and she glanced furtively at him.

The man and the woman were each subtle, and could read some unspoken words in the mind of each, and could interpret glances and attitudes. The change in their relations, which was accomplished in a moment's time, gave each a swift and satisfactory insight into the other.

Fermor did not reiterate his promise, and they walked slowly and in palpitating silence up and down the dark alley of yew trees. When they were quite secure from observation, Theodora stopped, and looking full into Fermor's face said, in a voice of concentrated meaning:

"I will make you the same promise, to do all I can for your happiness. You know perhaps something of what my life has been. I can tell you truly that I never loved Pietro Fontarini. I was but eighteen when I married him, and the fancy of a girl,

a mere child, is not love. Within a week of the time I married him—oh, my God!"

She clasped her hands together and her eyes filled with tears at the recollection of her sufferings.

"He was the basest creature," she continued in a trembling voice. "It is said that one should not speak ill of the dead, but I hate Pietro Fontarini dead, as I hated him living. I am a sincere woman and it would be false if I said anything else. It is not only that he caused the death of my child, and insulted and ill-treated me, but it was that he never told me the truth in his life. Perhaps in some ways I did not make allowances enough, for I was uncompromising, as most young people are, but there are some things one can't compromise. Pietro Fontarini, besides, planted in my mind a distrust and disbelief of God. You will believe me when I tell you that love has been unknown to me."

"I do believe you," replied Fermor with deep feeling, "and I knew as much before you spoke."

He took her hand again, and by that time Theodora's eyes overflowed, and she was weeping and trembling. Fermor felt as if he were receiving the first confidences of a young girl.

Theodora was a woman of much natural self-control and Fermor felt the profound flattery that was conveyed by this sudden breaking down of her reserve. He drew her to him and she leaned against his shoulder and wept silently, Fermor drying her eyes with her little lace-webbed handkerchief.

"Forget all that painful past," he said. "I will do all I can to make you forget it."

"I will try," answered Theodora, recovering her composure a little. "I don't know why all this should have burst from me. I had no intention of saying so much to you. I don't know why I did it."

"Perhaps," said Fermor, smiling, "you like me a little better than you thought you did."

Half an hour later they were sitting on the terrace, and Theodora was giving Fermor his tea, and they were talking so calmly together that the unobservant would never have known they had reached and passed within an hour, a crisis in their lives. But Fermor's usually cold face was eloquent with meaning, and there was a subdued light in Theodora's eyes. They felt a sweet return of their first youth. They were talking together upon the subject most interesting to the human mind, themselves and their affairs. Fermor gained a strange insight into Theodora's mind. The attitude of the American woman was extraordinarily different in many ways concerning domestic relations from the Englishwoman. There was no surrender of the will on Theodora's part, but a sweet complaisance that was in itself the essence of flattery to a man. She did not make him feel as if he were the only man in the world, but as if, knowing many men, she preferred to play the hazardous game of marriage with him than with any other man. Of her delicacy and tact, especially in regard to money, Fermor had ample proof. Many

things surprised and puzzled him, but he expected to find puzzles and surprises in every woman. One was that Theodora evidently expected that her marriage would make no changes whatever in her relations with her father, although she mentioned that Seymour had determined to take up his residence at Barleywood, a small estate which was a part of the King's Lyndon property.

"Papa and I have settled it," said Theodora. "Then I can see him every day, for I am sure papa could not be happy very far away from me, nor could I be happy with him far away."

Fermor agreed, as a newly engaged man does. He had heard and read of the devotion of the American father and he realised it was something totally different from the relations of the normal British father.

Fermor, following the custom of his country, pressed for an immediate marriage, at which Theodora was genuinely surprised. Fermor found himself secretly amused at the unexpected simplicity, the want of sophistication, in this woman of thirty who had been a wife and a mother.

After tea they walked up and down the terrace together in the darkening evening. Unconsciously, they slipped into the attitude of lovers, and when they leaned on the balustrade, watching the moon climbing into the sky, and the soft shadows of the night veil the odorous garden, Theodora's hand rested secretly, and with sweet content, in Fermor's.

Seymour had judiciously absented himself the whole afternoon, and when he returned and saw Fermor and Theodora on the terrace, he felt safe in asking Fermor to remain to dinner. To this Fermor coolly replied that he had come prepared both to dine and sleep if he were asked. At this, Theodora laughed, and Seymour smiling, extended the invitation to the next morning. Then, they separated to dress for dinner. After Theodora was dressed, she heard her father enter the little boudoir, and going into the room, she put her arms about his neck and kissed him with solemn tenderness.

"I am beginning a new life with hope—the hope of happiness. But, papa, nothing, nothing, can ever come between you and me. Not all my past wretchedness, nor any happiness which may be in store for me, will ever make any difference. You know that, don't you, papa?"

"Yes," replied Seymour, "I know it well."

He held Theodora off a little way and looked at her with profound pride. She had chosen for that evening the same silvery gown in which Fermor had first seen her at Petersham House.

Her aspect was altogether brighter and gayer than Seymour had ever expected to see in her again.

"Now," he said, "be ten minutes late in coming down. I daresay Lord Fermor wants to have a word or two with me, and I shall give him his chance."

Few men anticipate with pleasure the first inter-

view with a prospective father-in-law, but Fermor's was as easy as could well be expected.

"You see," said Seymour, as the two men sat together in the great, dim, rose-scented drawing-room waiting for Theodora, "my daughter is entirely alone in the world. The thought that I might die and leave her unprotected has been a most painful one to me. It was that which made me encourage her marriage with that——"

Seymour's singularly mild and placid face grew dark and almost distorted as he spoke.

"—That scoundrel, Pietro Fontarini. I am not a man of the world, Lord Fermor. I made my money very rapidly and even accidentally, and for certain reasons I have lived abroad. I don't understand the structure of European society at all, and I don't seem to be able to make myself very well understood by Europeans, although better with you and Major Ashburton than any men I have met so far. After my experience with Fontarini, you can't be surprised that I should take every possible precaution as far as I can to secure my daughter's happiness and independence, but I can assure you from a knowledge of her character that if you win her affection you will never be made to feel, either by her or by me, that the money is hers."

Seymour then coolly named a sum and the conditions upon which it was to be settled upon Theodora and any children which she might have, that was so large and on such generous terms that Fermor in-

voluntarily showed surprise. Seymour smiled his slow smile.

"Don't think," he said, "that this is a mere dowry for my daughter, with more to come. It is three-fourths of what I have, and the part I have kept for myself is three or four times as much as I'll spend, because my tastes are very simple. I shall go to live at Barleywood, and come over to see Theodora every day, and if I don't come, she will come to see me. And if I am ill you may depend upon it that Theodora won't give anyone much of her society until I am well again. That's my daughter, my Theodora, and that's the material of which good wives are made."

At that moment Theodora entered the drawing-room. There was something angelic in her appearance as the glow of the shaded lamps and the candles in the sconces of the great room shone upon her shimmering silvery gown that looked like a beam of moonlight. She was quite devoid of self-consciousness and far more composed and unembarrassed than was Fermor. This, too, struck Fermor's sense of humour. His American *fiancée* was full of the unexpected.

"It is all settled, my love," said Seymour, rising with Fermor as Theodora came up to them. "I think you will be happy, and my mind is at ease concerning you."

Fermor said what was expected of him, and said it as a sincere man should. Then they went in to dinner, at which Theodora presided with a soft bright-

ness, and with so little embarrassment that the butler and footmen, accustomed to English *fiancées*, concluded the whole business had gone wrong, and Lord Fermor had not proposed.

Fermor, at bed time, was pleased with the thoughtfulness which put him in his old rooms. Reyburn, taking a nurse's privilege, came to talk with him, while he smoked his last cigar in the room that had been his study, and looking out through the open window on the still summer night. Reyburn was full of praises of the new people at King's Lyndon.

"When Madame Fontarini told me you would probably spend the night, I said to her:

"'Perhaps, mem, Lord Fermor would like his old rooms,' and she said: 'I was just about to tell you to prepare those rooms.'"

When Fermor was left alone he still sat at the window and heard the great clock in the clock tower at the end of the terrace, chime twelve, one, and two o'clock. The moon had gone down, but the stars glittered brightly in the unclouded night sky. A soft wind, that seemed to come from a far-off world, fitfully stirred the trees and waved the ivy that curtained the wall. Fermor felt a strange peace upon his soul. He was surprised that he did not feel exactly the contrary, which might well be when one faces a cataclysmal change in one's life like marriage. To make this composure of his soul still stranger, he was conscious that the whole viewpoint of marriage was different on the part of

Theodora and her father than any to which he had been accustomed. The settlements offered by Seymour were magnificent, as far as his daughter was concerned, but made absolutely no provision for Fermor in the event of Theodora's death. He would have been perfectly justified, according to his code, in requiring a settlement on himself, and certainly would have demanded it had he been marrying an Englishwoman, but Fermor knew instinctively the least mention of a settlement on himself would be regarded as mercenary to the last degree. Even with this unprecedented uncertainty thrown in, he felt at ease. He even smiled to himself at the effect of this, which was practically to put him on his good behaviour as a husband and to keep him there, and laughed in anticipation of Lord Castlemaine's indignation and Lady Susan Battle's fury.

Theodora's confession touched Fermor deeply, and he asked himself if it were necessary for him to confess anything to Theodora, about Flora Bellenden, for instance. A very short reflection determined him to say nothing specific. He would tell Theodora that he had some things to repent and to be ashamed of in his former life, but that he had taken a resolution of amendment the very day and hour in which he first saw her. A sense of satisfaction pervaded Fermor's mind; he felt like a man going into battle for the first time, and being surprised and pleased at his own coolness.

Next morning he spent some hours with Theo-

dora before leaving by the noon train for London. Theodora was out early among her flower beds, according to her custom, and Fermor, while dressing, saw her pacing up and down the edge of the lake, and throwing bread to the waterfowl.

After breakfast Fermor and Theodora walked together through the park. New surprises awaited him at every point in his interview with Theodora. He had expected that the day for the marriage would be named before he left King's Lyndon and was thoroughly staggered when Theodora said she thought it would be best to wait until after Christmas at least, for many reasons, and that the engagement must be kept absolutely secret until not more than a month before the marriage took place.

"You see," she said calmly, as they stood in front of the little temple and watched the ducks sedately making their toilettes in the rushes, "the restoration of the house is well under way, and my father wishes me to be here to see that things are properly done. What are you laughing at?"

"I am trying to accommodate my British mind to your American ideals," replied Fermor, laughing still more. "It is all perfectly right, of course."

"But you never saw a daughter who had quite so many privileges as I," replied Theodora, smiling. "In America, daughters have great privileges, but I believe even in America my father would be reckoned the most indulgent of fathers. However, don't

you see that it is best not to arrange for our marriage until after Christmas, when everything will be in order?"

"I can't say that I do," replied Fermor like a gallant gentleman.

Nevertheless, he did see the sound sense in what Theodora said. The plans were all made, and the work, costing a very large sum of money, then going on, required someone to superintend it. Theodora was plainly that someone, and not Seymour. If the marriage should take place immediately, either Fermor and Theodora must go away, or if they remained, they would be embarrassed at every turn by the unfinished condition of their house. Then, too, Fermor's election was another reason for delay. But what Fermor could not understand was, the reason for not acknowledging the engagement.

"It would be useless and a little embarrassing," said Theodora, with gentle conviction. "It is no one's affair except yours and mine. I believe that you think it a little disreputable to keep it quiet."

"Well—er—an engaged man or woman going around with the engagement unacknowledged is looked upon as somewhat fraudulent, but I suppose we must learn of our cousins, the Americans."

"Decidedly you must, but we may arrange it in this way—that no engagement shall exist until after Christmas, we will say."

Fermor looked at Theodora with admiration.

"Where did you find out all of these ingenious

American subterfuges? You were not brought up in America; is it in the blood?"

"Yes," answered Theodora, "it is in the blood. I have not seen my native country since I was ten years old. I was educated in France and have spent my life in Italy and England, and yet I feel, I see the gulf between the American and European way of looking at things."

Fermor found himself acquiescing, if not actually agreeing, with Theodora in a manner which convinced him that he was fast deeply slipping in love with her.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Lord Castlemaine is Puzzled

Fermor returned to London to meet Lord Castlemaine by appointment. The town was quite deserted, but Castlemaine House stood open all the year round. Lord Castlemaine heard Fermor's account of the arrangement, the proposition concerning money, and all the other details of the engagement, including the secrecy of it, with amazement. He had, however, that perfect toleration of a man of the world, and his only comment was:

"I hereby reserve for myself the pleasure of telling these details to Susan Battle. Especially the not acknowledging the engagement. Ha! ha!"

Lord Castlemaine laughed a great laugh of amusement and fury.

Then he begun to talk about Fermor's election prospects, which were good, and announced his willingness to make several addresses to the voters of the division. Fermor referred him to his election managers, for Lord Castlemaine's political services were always particularly dreaded by those whom he offered to assist.

"It is a pity you can't have the help of your future wife in the present election," said Lord

Castlemaine. "That would seem a reason for having the marriage take place at once."

"She made it a reason for postponing the marriage," answered Fermor. "She has never contemplated speaking on platforms, and has a prejudice against it, and says she would not know what to say."

"She needn't say anything—none of them ever do. But she could simply sit on the platform, utter a few pretty things, and wear a fine gown. I shall tell her so if I have a chance."

Lord Castlemaine was not a man to wait for chances, but to make them. Two days afterward he appeared at King's Lyndon to make, as he told Fermor, his recommendations in person. Lord Castlemaine found Theodora deep in consultation with an eminent landscape gardener from London, who was looking slightly puzzled at the authority Theodora assumed in her father's absence.

"I was just saying to Mr. Clemsen," she said to Lord Castlemaine, "that my father and I had determined upon a restoration of the old Dutch gardens, beyond the Italian gardens, just as they were a hundred years ago. It is not that we are afraid of innovation, but that we think the original plan was good."

"Excellent," answered Lord Castlemaine. "The place is mentioned in Lord Hervey's Memoirs, and he says that the plan of the gardens, especially the

Dutch gardens, he considered better than those at Kew."

"But we have advanced a little——" begun Clemsen.

"Retrograded, you mean," interrupted Lord Castlemaine. "The old Italians knew more about gardens than ever we shall know, and the old Romans antedated them. The Dutch even knew more than we do. No, my dear Madame Fontarini, you have shown your usual good taste in restoring the gardens. I don't say that from prejudice, because as a matter of fact I never had any particular attachment to this place. It ate up a great deal of money when I kept it going, and I could neither take it up to London with me, nor bring London down here."

Theodora invited him into the house, but Lord Castlemaine, who meant to have a talk in which he could air his opinions freely, and could raise his voice if necessary, suggested to Theodora that they walk through the shrubbery.

Once alone on the velvet grass in the summer morning, Lord Castlemaine expressed his pleasure in very handsome terms at the coming marriage. No man could turn a compliment better than the Earl of Castlemaine, and Theodora's woman's pride was flattered by this polished savage being so amiable to her.

"The only fault I find," he said, "is the post-

ponement of the marriage. As to the engagement, it is in England a base thing to let a *fiancé* go at large without ticketing him, but we are learning of the Americans, my dear lady, a great many artful things. So if Fermor wins you in the end, we may adopt some of your interesting methods. But I do think it a pity that Fermor has not the benefit of your services in the campaign, as you call it in America. You should be married at once, and as Lady Fermor, you could go on the platform and you would be a great success."

"I go on the platform!" cried Theodora. "What could I possibly say that any voter would want to hear?"

"My charming friend, you need not say anything. Show your attractive self and tell the voters your ambition is that your husband shall be an M. P."

"Nobody can convince others who is not himself or herself convinced," replied Theodora, with the same gentle decisiveness that was always astonishing Fermor.

It astonished and diverted Lord Castlemaine, who said to himself that Lady Susan Battle would find it no merry jest to demolish this soft-voiced, clear-eyed woman, and he promised himself the pleasure of being present if possible on some of the occasions when Lady Susan Battle should, as she certainly would, attempt to make a Roman holiday of the future Lady Fermor. Lord Castlemaine had

come down with the fixed intention of doing two things. One was, hastening the marriage; the other, of getting some better terms out of Seymour for Fermor. This last might be called a purely disinterested effort to obtain justice for an Englishman.

After a very agreeable walk and interesting conversation with Theodora, Lord Castlemaine discovered, as Fermor had done, that he was dealing with a new variety of woman, known to him heretofore in theory, but not in practice. Her native language was English, but with that exception she was markedly unlike an Englishwoman or any other variety of woman with whom Lord Castlemaine was familiar either in life or literature. As in Lord Fermor's case, Lord Castlemaine was secretly amused and interested at the infinite difference between what he expected Theodora to say and do and what she said and did. Always smiling, composed, and complaisant in manner, she innocently assumed, meanwhile, that she was mistress of the situation. At the conclusion of the interview, Lord Castlemaine, who never blinked the truth to himself, however he might do it to others, was convinced that he had been completely unhorsed in his first tilt, and that Theodora would not be married until it suited her sovereign pleasure.

At luncheon Seymour appeared, and was the soul of simple and kindly hospitality. There was neither elation nor patronage in his manner and an entire absence of self-consciousness both on his part and

Theodora's. Lord Castlemaine thought he had never seen so unembarrassed a *fiancée* as his future daughter-in-law.

After luncheon Lord Castlemaine expected to be left alone with Seymour when he would broach the question of Fermor's financial terms. Himself having treated Fermor with the greatest injustice and rapine, as it were, he was, like many other men, willing to force what he considered justice for Fermor from another man. Besides, Lord Castlemaine had in him the ineradicable germ of respect for his order. After all, Fermor was conferring a great honour, so Lord Castlemaine honestly thought, upon this unknown and obscure American woman, whose sole title to equality he considered was her marriage, disastrous though it might be, into the great Roman family of Fontarini. He could not but think that Seymour would prove more malleable in the matter of money than Theodora had been on the question of the date of the marriage.

When the two men went out on the terrace to smoke, however, Seymour, after his custom, drew Theodora's arm within his arm. She struck the match for her father's cigar, and showed him the prettiest little attentions imaginable.

The idea that Lord Castlemaine might have something to discuss with Seymour plainly did not enter either Seymour's or Theodora's mind. When the cigars were finished, Lord Castlemaine with his usual frankness said to Seymour:

"There are some matters I should like very much to discuss with you in private. Perhaps Madame Fontarini will excuse us for half an hour."

Theodora rose with a slightly heightened colour, and regretted that she had not left her future father-in-law alone with her father.

When she had stepped indoors, Lord Castlemaine said:

"I think it would be rather better if our conversation were in a more private place."

"Come into my study," replied Seymour.

Lord Castlemaine followed his host into a small room, up a flight of stairs, one of the few which the workmen had not invaded.

"It is next my daughter's boudoir," said Seymour, shutting the door. "It is very convenient on that account. But my daughter is not in her boudoir at present and it is quite private."

Lord Castlemaine knew the room well and its unchanged appearance gave him a feeling as if King's Lyndon had not yet entirely passed out of his possession. He began with his usual directness.

"Fermor has told me," he said, "of the really magnificent settlements you have made upon Madame Fontarini, and I suppose he is very much in love with your daughter, who is certainly charming enough in all conscience, to have agreed to the terms on which it is given her. For himself, there is absolutely no provision in the event of the future Lady Fermor's death, and even if there are children, every-

thing appears to be tied up so that Fermor is made a pensioner, so to speak, upon his children."

This plain and accurate statement of the case did not appear to shock or surprise Seymour. On the contrary, after a moment's reflection, he said:

"I think you have stated it clearly enough. I'm doing for my daughter what any American father would do, I think. If Lord Fermor shows my daughter the kindness and affection for which I hope, I'll say to you, as I said to him, that you will never be made to feel either by her or by me that the money came to him by marriage instead of inheritance."

"Very pretty that," said Lord Castlemaine, "but absolutely outlandish according to British ideals. Everything connected with marriage is a compromise, and our ideas concerning a woman's fortune in marriage are so radically different from American ideas that mutual concessions must be made. What we would consider perfectly justifiable conduct on the part of a husband, you might, according to the American notion, consider quite unjustifiable. The future Lady Fermor might withhold from her husband for reasons not accepted by us, money which we would consider him justly entitled to claim. And if there are children, they would find out eventually their father's state of dependence, and the whole position would be intolerable for Fermor."

Seymour had listened with his usual mild manner, and Lord Castlemaine concluded that as a man of business, Seymour was able to see the matter from

the practical point of view. He was disillusioned, however, when Seymour, after a pause replied with calm deliberation, tapping a pencil lightly on the table to emphasise what he said as he looked straight into Lord Castlemaine's brilliant eyes, shining under his beetling brows:

"I'm afraid there isn't much room for compromise in this matter. If Lord Fermor feels that he is not being well treated, he is at perfect liberty to withdraw now and at any moment up to the very hour that the marriage is to take place, and in this I speak for my daughter as well as for myself. All Lord Fermor has to do is to intimate what you say and the thing is settled. As a result of keeping the engagement entirely secret, my daughter will not be embarrassed by Lord Fermor's withdrawal."

Here was the unexpected with a vengeance. The heir presumptive to an earldom in England is not suffered to withdraw from a marriage engagement at the least intimation, and without the slightest smirch upon his honour. There could be no doubt of Seymour's sincerity, and that he knew what he was talking about. Lord Castlemaine, a little staggered, said, following a pause:

"I don't think there is any question of withdrawal. I am inclined to suspect Lord Fermor of being, as I told you before, very much charmed with Madame Fontarini."

"I suppose he must be if he wants to marry her," replied Seymour placidly, "and my daughter is a

woman very well calculated to make a man fall in love with her. I'm very proud of my daughter, Lord Castlemaine."

"I never saw an American father who wasn't proud of a daughter," replied Lord Castlemaine with a cheerful grin, "and I have seen some American daughters by no means as charming as Madame Fontarini, who were regarded with awe and delight by their adoring parents, though not by anybody else. However, to return from the abstract to the concrete. If there are children, as I say, it would appear as if Lord Fermor would have no control whatever over their property. Everything would be in the hands of trustees."

"He would have the moral influence of a good father," answered Seymour, "and if he is not a good father and didn't treat them properly, I should simply go, as any other American father would do, and take my daughter and her children away from him."

Lord Castlemaine thought that life held no more surprises for him, but this cool statement made by a man whom he considered simple in some ways, though clear-headed enough in others, astounded him.

"I think, you might find great difficulty in carrying out this plan in England," said Lord Castlemaine; "the courts would never permit it."

"Perhaps not," replied Seymour, "but that is a conclusive reason for making Lord Fermor's income dependent upon his good treatment of my daugh-

ter. In America a father has no legal right to his daughter's children, but I can truly say I never heard of an instance where a father to protect his daughter from an unkind husband, failed to take her children with her, because the woman, you see, won't leave her children behind. That is the unwritten law, and the unwritten law is much more closely observed in America than the written law. It's up to the son-in-law then to get the courts to allow him to see his children, but the courts are invariably very chary in giving free access on the part of a bad father or husband to his children. The burden of proof is upon him, and the court is generally dead set against him."

"You wouldn't find an English court dead set against the man under those circumstances," said Lord Castlemaine.

"Probably not, but I assure you that if my daughter and her children were ill treated I would get her out of her husband's hands if it cost me every dollar I have on earth. In her marriage with Pietro Fontarini, she kept many things from me, knowing very well what I would do, and I for a long time, not looking beneath the surface, didn't know her sufferings. I made a blunder of it from the beginning to the end of that marriage, and I determined that if my daughter ever marries again, I would protect her against such awful possibilities."

Lord Castlemaine sat silent. He was aware that he had received an ultimatum, and that it was use-

less to say another word on the subject. While he was turning over the matter of this unreasonableness on the part of American fathers, Seymour spoke with a note in his voice which Lord Castlemaine had not before heard.

"May I ask if you in any way represent Lord Fermor in this matter?"

"No," answered Lord Castlemaine. "I told him that he was very much——. Well, never mind what I said, but there was no suggestion on his part in any attempt to change the terms of settlement."

"Consider well, Lord Castlemaine," said Seymour, fixing his eyes on Lord Castlemaine, "and consult your memory again to make absolutely sure."

Lord Castlemaine shook his head.

"Fermor did not say a word looking to a demand for a change in the settlements."

"I am glad of that, for the good opinion I wish to entertain of Lord Fermor. If this suggestion had come from him in the remotest degree, or even if he had known the object of your interview, the engagement would have been off at this moment."

Lord Castlemaine sat plunged forward in his chair looking through the window at the wide green lawns, the glowing gardens, the ornamental water, basking in the still, quiet summer afternoon.

What a people were these Americans anyhow! There was Theodora, who had in her, Lord Castlemaine was well convinced, nothing of surrender that

was not voluntary. Lady Susan Battle in her most voluminous crimson satin or enormous purple velvet gown, with her tallest feathers and her largest gloves and shoes, would not make the slightest impression upon this delicately made, gentle-voiced woman. And here was Seymour, this provincial American, with his habit of saying "Sir," upon unnecessary occasions, and his general want of sophistication, who coolly proposed to throw over Fermor if the least effort were made to put him on a footing which no English father would dream of denying to him. And the worst of it was there was no doing anything with either of these recalcitrants.

Lord Castlemaine rose, grinning. He rather enjoyed his defeat; it had in it some comic elements, and, after all, it was Fermor, and not he, who was being robbed of his own, so to speak. He realised that Seymour might have retaliated by reminding him that he had not himself paid the slightest regard to Fermor's rights, but Lord Castlemaine concluded that rights of property were so little understand by Americans that Seymour would scarcely appreciate that point. There was clearly nothing more to be said, and Lord Castlemaine took his leave. The coming discomfiture of Lady Susan Battle, he concluded, would be more entertaining and dramatic even than he expected, and it would be very much enlivened by what he himself had to tell of his own unhorsing.

## CHAPTER XV

### Light! More Light!

Fermor as a lover proved a model of good taste and discretion. His electoral labours in the division accounted for his being frequently in the neighbourhood, and especially at King's Lyndon, in order to retain as much as possible of the interest he had once possessed there. The upset condition of the house and the necessity of superintending the great masses of work, kept Theodora much at home, so that there was little beyond the general suspicion attached to every man in Europe who looks twice at a woman, to connect Theodora's name with Fermor's.

While Fermor was busy with his election matters, and meanwhile doing an immense amount of reading on parliamental affairs, Theodora was pursuing a new train of thought. For the first time in ten years she caught a glimpse of the blue sky above her. She began to ask herself the true meaning of it. Were she and all the multitudes of human souls that had ever existed, really puppets in the awful sport of Destiny, and was the Power that creates, a vast blundering, bungling force that could make things, but could not control them when made? She began to feel for the first time a strong craving for light. Before this, she had demanded help from God, first

with eager confidence, then with agonised supplication, and at last in sullen and silent resentment. Two or three times while in London some impulse had drawn her within the open door of a church. They had been Roman Catholic churches, simply because their doors were open. The freedom to come and go, the dim seclusion, the faint but undying light that burned before the altar, gave her a sense of repose, and the subtle feeling of the Divine Presence. She found herself involuntarily kneeling and bowing her head upon her hands. Then, the memory of her Italian life would return to her, the hours that she spent kneeling on the stones of Roman churches, imploring Jesus if He were really present on the altar, to help her, as He had helped those who came to Him in the Judean villages by the shores of Galilee, in the house of Simon, the rich leper, and Peter, the illiterate fisherman. But no help had come, and as this thought forced itself into her mind she would feel hatred and scorn for a God who could help His creatures and would not. This feeling was always more poignant when she was in a church, and it seemed as if there were a Presence there, a God who could help, but would not.

She recalled the gorgeous Italian basilicas, the magnificent ceremonials, the multitudes of kneeling people, the lights, the incense, the Gothic architecture, which of itself directed all eyes, all rays of light, all hearts, all minds, toward the altar. That Theodora felt awed and touched under those cir-

cumstances she understood was not strange; she was moved by the great psychic wave of belief and prayer that swept over the multitudes. But this was absent when she entered a lonely and darkened church, with only a few kneeling figures, the altar without ceremonial, only the light burning before the Tabernacle. She had seen much of what was called piety in the family of Fontarini. They regarded her as heretical and used every mode of persuasion and even a sort of coercion to induce her at least to conform outwardly to the Roman Catholic religion. But Theodora was too sincere for this. These appeals which to Theodora's clear perception were not addressed to her heart, but only to her conduct, gave her a distrust for the religion of the Fontarinis. Only in Cardinal Fontarini did she find any real love of God. He combined the utmost outward splendour and dignity with a monk-like austerity of which the world knew nothing. One of the finest of the cardinals' residences in Rome belonged to Cardinal Fontarini, but he himself lived in two bare little rooms and fared like an anchorite. He was a student and a scholar and had but little understanding of women, least of all this young American girl, who was thinking and acting for herself at a time when Italian girls are reciting their lessons in a convent. But after Pietro Fontarini's conduct had culminated in the death of the child, and when the issue was made between Theodora on one side and on the other the great Fontarini family, bent on protect-

ing the name of Fontarini, did the Cardinal declare himself openly on Theodora's side. Even then the understanding between himself and Theodora had not been very clear, beyond the Cardinal recognising in Theodora an innocent and stricken creature, and Theodora finding in the Cardinal a perfect integrity of mind and courage to take the side of the injured. A correspondence had been maintained between them at long but regular intervals. It consisted of grateful and respectful letters from Theodora, and brief but kind answers from the Cardinal. But Theodora never dreamed of telling him her doubts and her desires. Now, when in a few months she would again become a wife, Theodora began to reflect upon marriage in its sacramental aspect. Her natural loftiness of mind and delicacy of temperament made her a disbeliever in divorce. She revolted from the idea that marriage was a civil contract merely, and that when the contract was violated, anothed civil contract could be formed. She asked herself how could religion give its sanction to marriage unless it were inviolable? Theodora found herself obliged to admit that the only inviolable marriage bond was that furnished by the Roman Catholic Church. Slowly, but inevitably, a strong desire formed itself in Theodora's mind to be married by the Roman Catholic rite, if possible. But would it be possible if neither she nor Lord Fermor were Roman Catholics? Nor did she find in herself at first any inclination to become a Roman Catholic. It was too

much like paying a price to obtain what she wanted, the sacramental character attached to her marriage. There was none to whom she could speak these thoughts; they would simply have mystified her father.

After some weeks, she concluded to go and ask an interview with the parish priest at Hillborough, where she had gone to Mass with Ashburton and the Marsacs.

The day was wet and stormy when Theodora started, but this child of fortune and misfortune had all the appliances of money at her command, and Hillborough could be reached in half an hour by a motor car. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, dark and rainy, when Theodora found herself in the study of the parish priest. In a moment or two, he entered and introduced himself as Father Redcliffe. Theodora looked at him with a curious kind of sympathy and admiration. He was young, barely thirty, and looked much less, and had an ascetic beauty, a noble innocence such as a man may well have who is destined from his cradle to be a Levite. His figure was slight, but well made, as his black robe revealed, and his thin aquiline features were extremely handsome. He had the large thin-lipped mouth of the orator and a beautiful softness and benignancy shone in his young face. He was so polished, so graceful, so charming, Theodora felt instantly at ease with him. She knew that Kemlin Redcliffe came of one of the oldest and most distinguished

Roman Catholic families in England, and she saw that his nature was pure and spiritual. In truth, the severe discipline and self-sacrifice of the priesthood were so easy, so natural to Kemlin Redcliffe that it scarcely seemed either discipline or self-sacrifice. He had passed from a beautiful and pious home-life into the religious life, where his steadiness, his purity of intention, his antecedents, placed him in charge of a parish at an extremely early age. The heaviest care he had ever known was the attention to the duties of his parish. He would have liked to give himself absolutely to the spiritual side of his work and to the contemplation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The petty and even sordid details of the work of a parish priest were very grievous to him, but he forced himself to attend to them rigidly, and thereby, although without much natural executive ability, he managed to conduct things properly in his parish. His was one of those happy natures which can believe any miracle of God's goodness, and is without doubts and questionings. There was deep sympathy in his attitude toward other men, but not always clear understanding, and this was what Theodora felt when he sat beside her and fixed his large, clear gaze upon her. Her heart sank a little. She thought it well to tell him something of her former life, and to her surprise and great relief, she found he knew much of it.

"I was in Rome studying at the English College at the time you mention," he said, "and had some

Italian friends who knew you. There was much sympathy for you."

Then Theodora began to tell him of her wishes and her doubts. She had an earnest, even a desperate, desire to be married by the Roman Catholic ceremonial, because that to her represented the only one that was inviolable, but she was not a Roman Catholic nor did she know if she could ever become one. Yet she felt that singular yearning for the Real Presence of God which is the secret motive of many of those who become Roman Catholics. But for that very reason, because of this yearning, because of the desire to have the blessing of the Church upon her marriage, she distrusted herself. Father Redcliffe listened gravely, but at each word she spoke Theodora felt that instead of drawing nearer in comprehension they grew farther apart.

"And how would your father, may I ask, receive your wish to be married by the Church?"

"My father would not make the slightest objection. He has never gainsaid me in any respect," replied Theodora.

A look of surprise, of distrust, of pity, came into Father Redcliffe's eyes. Theodora saw it and felt for the thousandth time how different her American mind and viewpoint must ever be from that of the people in the older world. She knew the impossibility of making the relations between herself and her father clear to Father Redcliffe, and said nothing more.

"And what do you think would be Lord Fermor's attitude in respect to the ceremony, if you should by that time have made up your mind to unite yourself with the Church?"

"I don't think," replied Theodora after a moment, "that Lord Fermor would, or in fact could, object —a bridegroom could scarcely object——"

Theodora paused with a faint smile. How could she ever make this gentle, handsome, seventeenth-century young priest understand that obligation on the part of a man to submit his wishes so absolutely to the woman? Clearly Father Redcliffe did not understand it at all.

Then Theodora falteringly touched upon some of her questionings. Father Redcliffe answered her readily enough out of books, but the mind which has never had a doubt is never at one with the mind that has wrestled with doubt from the beginning.

After half an hour's talk Theodora rose to go. Nothing could have been kinder, nor could there have been a more Christlike courtesy than the young priest showed Theodora as he went with her to the door, and asked her to come again. But Theodora had the inward consciousness that not only she had not made herself understood, but that she could never make herself understood by this gentle, suave, young priest, who lived upon a crust that he might give to the poor, and who rose from his bed at midnight to cast himself in an ecstasy of prayer before the Crucifix.

Going back through the rainy twilight, Theodora with a sense of failure asked herself to whom she could turn for counsel. The thought suddenly occurred to her that Ashburton was the person. At first she thought she would write to him, and then determined to wait until his next visit, which would be before very long.

When she reached home, she went direct to the small room which was her father's study. There, to her pleasure, she found Ashburton. No two men ever liked better to be together than Ashburton and Seymour. When Theodora entered, Seymour first had satisfied himself that she had not caught cold in the rain, and then continued the conversation, holding Theodora's hand as she leaned smilingly over his chair. He was trying to convince Ashburton that a sum of money could be distributed advantageously to lately released prisoners, by a society formed for their benefit. Ashburton strongly controverted him, and finally flatly accused Seymour of being a perverter of morals by his readiness to bestow money without sufficient consideration as to whether it would do good or harm. Seymour did not accept with his usual modest acquiescence Ashburton's charge, but with more warmth than Theodora had often seen him show, he urged that recently released prisoners should have money in order to keep them from returning to their old temptations. He spoke so strongly that not only Ashburton, but Theodora was surprised, and ended by declaring his

intention to send a cheque to the society that very evening. Then he added, with a smile, to Ashburton:

"This is the first time I have gone against your advice since we met at the bedside of the Barotti boy."

"You are like all other men," said Ashburton, assuming the Englishman's attitude, with his back to the fire. "You are never tired of praising my practical methods until they come into collision with your own notions. Nobody can coerce you but Madame Fontarini, and she ought to do it."

"Never!" cried Theodora. "Papa shall have his own way in everything as long as I can give it to him."

Ashburton had come for the night, and after a pleasant dinner, Seymour left him with Theodora in her little sitting-room that gave upon the terrace. Seymour announced that he was going to his study to send off his cheque. As he went out of the room, Ashburton said to him:

"Don't make it twice what you originally meant it to be."

And Theodora cried:

"Make it anything you like. Don't pay any attention to this bad man."

The evening had grown chilly and a fire sparkled on the hearth. The soft light of the lamp fell upon Theodora's silky black hair, and her clinging white gown. Ashburton felt as Fermor did, that strange

and indefinable interest in a woman who had passed through deep waters, who had looked into gulfs of shame and wickedness, and who had endured storms of misery and humiliation, whose emotions had been rent and racked more in her first youth than most women in a lifetime, but who in other ways was innocent, even childlike, and unsophisticated beyond words. He doubted if all of Madame Fontarini's sorrowful experiences had really taught her much knowledge of the world.

Suddenly Theodora began to tell of her visit of that afternoon and its fruitlessness, and before she knew it, the whole story of her doubts, her wishes, her longings, was poured forth to Ashburton. There was no doubt of his perfect understanding, as well as his sympathy. He saw in Theodora a natural willingness to do what is right, a willingness so natural that her aspirations were for a higher spiritual life. She explained to him the two things which she craved in the Roman Catholic church; the sacramental marriage and the Real Presence. Theodora had the art of explaining with vividness the subtleties of her mind, and also, as the case often is with women, she was more logical than reasonable. She evidently had no suspicion that Lord Fermor would attempt to interfere with her views on marriage, and when Ashburton gently suggested it, Theodora looked genuinely surprised.

"I found that in Italy," she said, "and could no doubt find it in Spain or Russia, but I hardly

thought of finding it in England, the land of religious freedom."

"No—only religious toleration," replied Ashburton. "You remember, as Wyndham said that Sunday afternoon, that with a state church and a sovereign who takes a mediæval oath on his accession, there can be no such thing as religious liberty. I should think, however, it would be prudent for you at least to consult Fermor before going farther in this business."

"Consult Lord Fermor, or even my father, as to what I should believe!" cried Theodora, standing up and extending her hands with a gesture of earnestness. "We believe, not what we wish to believe, but what we must believe. My father is too just, too spiritual minded himself to make the least objection to my seeking the truth and adopting it when I think I have found it. Is it fair to Lord Fermor to suppose that he is any less just than my father?"

Ashburton rose too, smiling a little at this feminine reasoning, and yet admiring the generous rashness of Theodora's view.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I can't advise you. I can only sympathise with you. I can recommend you to a man in London, now a parish priest, once a chaplain in my regiment. He made me a Roman Catholic, not from any transcendentalism in my nature, for I am only a plain soldier, but because I hate what is negative and must have what is positive, because I love order and discipline and see the neces-

sity for direction in moral and spiritual matters. I was the easiest man on earth to convert, because I am accustomed to receiving orders and to giving them. You, I think, will be difficult, and there are vast obstacles in your way, which you evidently do not realise. It is by no means the simple thing for an Englishman or an Englishwoman to become a Roman Catholic that it is for an American. You will have to consider that Lord Fermor's political future may be very much affected, even ruined, by it."

"For that I should be sorry," replied Theodora, "but there is no chance of it, because technically there is no engagement between us until after the bye-election is over. In any event, Lord Fermor will have to take me as I am, or not take me at all. As for Lord Castlemaine and the family connection——"

Theodora made a little gesture indicating supreme indifference for forces of which she had heard little and knew less.

"I would advise you to go up to London and see Father White. He can't come down here to you because he works like a cab horse, real work, you understand."

"I think I shall do as you say," said Theodora.

Then they sat down and they talked intimately until late. Seymour came in for a few moments to say good-night to his daughter and guest, and went out again. The house grew still and the dropping

of rain on the terrace outside penetrated the silence of the quiet room.

When Theodora was in her own room, she looked out into the murky night, upon a world all dark and melancholy, with vast black shadows and great masses of pallid grey rain. But even as she looked, the rain turned to mist that lay like a white robe upon the earth, the clouds suddenly parted, turning from black to silver, and drifted off under a westerly wind, and the stars were shining steadily and brightly overhead. Theodora's heart grew calm. She felt a deep sense of gratitude to Ashburton. His good sense, his sound practical ideas, appealed to her, even his want of imagination steadied her own rich and ungoverned fancy. He was like her father, only far more a man of the world, and shrewd where Seymour was simple. Theodora could not bring herself to think that Fermor would attempt to coerce her mind, and pleased herself with the natural feminine idea of yielding to Fermor in all things material, and having him yield to her in all things moral and spiritual.

Ashburton, in his turn, looked out from his window upon the same scene with far different thoughts. Theodora had from the beginning possessed for him a singular interest. As he had never cared much for the society of women and respected, rather than liked them, he was surprised at the hold Theodora had taken upon him. He knew nothing of a close friendship with an unmarried woman, that being

utterly unknown and disallowed in Europe, but after that long and intimate evening with Theodora, something of the charm of affection that is not passion, between a man and a woman, made itself clear to him. Perhaps it assumed the form of a vague dream, an indefined longing—he began to think Fermor would be a very happy man.

But the treasure of Theodora's friendship, her confidence, her affection, was very great, and Ashburton felt with a deep sense of satisfaction that this treasure had become his that night.

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Soul and the Heart

A week later Theodora said to her father when they parted for the night:

"Papa, I am going up to London to-morrow to see Father White, a Roman Catholic priest. Major Ashburton advised me to see him. Perhaps I may become a Roman Catholic."

Seymour received this announcement as calmly as it was made, and replied:

"Whatever you become, my dear, you can never be a better daughter to me than you have been."

The next morning at eight o'clock, while the mist still lay over the meadows, Theodora came down prepared to start for London. Her mind was far from being at ease. The idea that not only her relations with Fermor, but his future could be affected by anything she might do in a spiritual way, was new and disturbing.

Theodora's interview with Father White was fixed for ten o'clock, and it was striking the hour as she entered the private reception-room. The door was of clear glass, uncurtained, so that all that passed within could be seen, but nothing could be heard. Almost immediately, Father White entered. He had the unmistakable air of military life, but he pro-

duced the effect upon Theodora of being more intellectual than Ashburton and more practical and sympathetic than Father Redcliffe. Theodora told him of her thoughts and wishes, of the impending change in her life and the difficulties suggested by Ashburton, without mentioning Lord Fermor's name.

"Major Ashburton has not understated any of the perplexities in your path," he answered. "But there are some natures which cannot compromise with truth; yours, I think, is one of them. I would not advise you to enter the Church on the mere longing of which you speak, but to read, to study, to think, and, above all, to pray."

Theodora remained the whole half hour that Father White had given her. When she went out upon the street again, she walked along reflectively, her eyes upon the ground.

In a few minutes she found herself before the open door of Father White's shabby church. It was a holiday and High Mass was in progress. Theodora, obeying the impulse to enter the open door of any church, walked in and seated herself in a dark corner. The music was florid and bad, the altar and its decorations tawdry, but a look around the small congregation revealed why this was. The people were of the shopkeeping and artisan class. Many of the men had an unmistakable out-of-work look. Theodora was too sensitive to beauty, to magnificence, to great ceremonials, not to be equally averse to what was cheap

and unlovely, and the outward aspect struck her disagreeably. Nevertheless, she could not escape from the same feeling which had haunted her in the majestic gloom of great cathedrals, that there was a Divine Presence in the church. A few minutes after she came in, Father White entered from the sacristy, and ascending the little pulpit began a sermon which lasted barely fifteen minutes. There was in his voice an indefinable note of command, a note which fascinated Theodora because it was positive. He spoke with the authority of an officer who had received a commission, and is giving instructions under it. His theme might have been called commonplace, but it was perfectly adapted to his congregation, the kind of congregation which assembles in London when all who can go, are gone away. He spoke to the workingmen of the Teacher, who was Himself a workingman, and compared Jesus, the humble artisan, the son of work and poverty, with a brief public life of three years in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire, with the splendid position of Confucius, who received magnificent honours during his lifetime; Mahomet, the great ruler and law-giver; of Buddha, the mighty prince, and how great their power had been during their lives, while the poor and despised Jesus had none of the glory of this world and met a malefactor's death. Yet the religion of the Carpenter had marched steadily onward, ignoring racial and geographical lines, while that of the philosopher, the conqueror, the monarch, remained

stationary and strictly racial and national. The idea was not new to Theodora, but she was impressed by the man who could deal sympathetically with the rich, the learned, and the analytical, and also with those whose chief concern was their weekly wage on Saturday night. She began to have a glimmer of the true way to approach the poor, and to realise that her father's lavish giving, not only of his money but of his time and strength, was not the only help which the poor most needed, nor could it be practised by many persons.

Theodora returned that afternoon to King's Lyndon, and after dinner, when she and her father were sitting together in her own little sitting-room, she told Seymour all about her visit.

"You can't go wrong if you follow Ashburton's advice." remarked Seymour.

He did not mention Fermor, and it was evident the idea had not occurred to him that Fermor could object to anything Theodora might do.

The weeks passed with great rapidity to Theodora. She was deeply interested in the rehabilitation of the place which was beginning to show signs of nearing completion. Barotti's weekly violin lesson was a joy to Theodora. She had taken up her music again with the greatest enthusiasm, and did her two-hours' practice every day, or every evening. The acoustics of the great ballroom were wonderfully fine, and there, in the evening while her father read his newspaper in his own quarters, Theodora

would go, and by the light of a single candle, which made but a spark in the gloom of the vast and lofty room, she would speak to her violin and make it speak for her. She liked the thought that she was alone in the great apartment, and that the thrilling and the laughter and the wailing of the strings could be heard by no ear but her own. The darkness, the mysterious seclusion, inspired her as she played. The appeal of music is so entirely to the emotions, and so absolutely null to the intellect, that these hours in the dark ballroom, with its one faint spark of light, were given over to the sorrows, the few joys, the fair, fresh hopes, which filled Theodora's heart. Being a woman, and not a girl, she had acknowledged to herself that her heart was more engaged with Fermor than he or anyone else knew. Her pride was ever armed and watchful and she was discerning enough to know that unasked love is one of the most wearisome and annoying things on earth to a man. She was fully capable of acting the part to Lord Fermor of the woman who makes a marriage of friendship and respect, a thing so common in Europe that nobody ever remarks upon it. Theodora was not without a haughty confidence in herself, and had not the least fear that Lord Fermor or anyone else would find out her secret. The sweet hopes and pretty dreams that sprang up in her path and showed their smiling faces like the first snowdrops of the spring were known only to herself. Like a true woman, she thought that Fermor should

be made to sue for her love, and to ask long for what was already his, unknown to him. Theodora could look into her mirror and see a rosy vision; she understood perfectly well the charm of beautiful accessories, and her woman's vanity recognised easily enough that she lost nothing by comparison with the more florid beauty of Englishwomen. These ideas, feminine and even girlish, were the more charming to her because she had thought that they could never be her portion again.

The bye-election was to come off early in September and Fermor had his hands full until then. He contrived to spend an occasional afternoon at King's Lyndon, but Theodora, true to her policy of reticence and reserve, never gave him an invitation to remain the night.

He wrote her brief occasional letters, to which she replied with charming grace, but these little letters might just as well have been written to Lord Castlemaine, so far as any personal note was contained in them. This was new to Fermor, and somewhat rueful to him. It was plain that the task of courtship was left entirely to himself, and that where an Englishwoman would have met him half way, this American woman required him to go the whole distance himself.

The bye-election was extremely close, and it took the official count to determine whether Fermor had carried the division. He had, however, by the nar-

row margin of something less than a hundred votes. The election hung in the balance for forty-eight hours, and in that time Fermor appeared at King's Lyndon. He had arranged his visit in advance, supposing that he would come either as an elected or defeated candidate, but as it was, the result was not positively known. It was a soft September evening when Fermor arrived to dine and return to London that night. The purple twilight was falling when he arrived near seven o'clock. Theodora awaited him on the terrace with her father. Seymour, who easily persuaded himself that Fermor adored Theodora, was anxious to be out of the way, but Theodora would not hear of it.

The evening was cool for the season and the light of the clear-obscure lay over the gardens now beautiful and flourishing, the darkling waters of the lake, and the misty uplands of the park. As Theodora looked toward the beautiful gardens and trim shrubberies, she thought that a like change to theirs had come upon her. Out of neglect and disaster beauty seemed to be once more recreated. She still wore no colours, as she had never done since her child's death, but instead of the severe simplicity of the black gowns she had worn a year ago, she now adopted those which, though still black, had a filmy beauty and elaborate elegance, and that took from them all suggestion of mourning. Upon her delicate head was a great black hat and feathers,

that might have graced a Romney or a Gainsborough portrait, and her milk-white arms, bared to the elbow, revealed one of her greatest beauties.

When Fermor at last appeared, Theodora saw even in the twilight, that although cheerful, he was pale and worn. He had worked hard, and more was at stake for him than a seat in Parliament. It was for him the turning point in life, the chance that he had asked for ever since he had worn hair on his face, the only thing for which he was fitted. The uncertainty after all his labours told upon him, and he felt himself in want of encouragement. It is a characteristic of women that they are acutely sympathetic with all forms of bodily suffering. Fermor's pallor, his confession that much travelling and speaking had wearied him and that his nights of late had been sleepless, went to Theodora's heart quicker than any other plea he could have made. She smiled upon him, and for the first time in their acquaintance suggested a stroll with him. Fermor, pleased and surprised, walked by her side across the lawns and down to the yew walk by the lake. He was plainly tired and depressed, and Theodora put forward some of her sweetest arts to charm him. The thought occurred to Fermor, as he looked at Theodora, her face uplifted to his as she talked gently to him:

"What anxieties, griefs and losses has this woman known! and how little of what I feel compares with what she has undergone!"

Still he suffered, and Theodora saw it and soothed him. He remained to dinner, and left soon afterwards, obviously in better spirits than when he came.

That night, Theodora fell asleep with a sense of triumph in her heart. She had exercised over Fermor one of the greatest of woman's weapons—the power to console.

It was arranged that Fermor should wire her next day the instant the result of the election was known. All day Theodora waited in silent impatience for the despatch which did not come.

Seymour, who was deeply interested in the election, got conflicting news late in the afternoon. At nine o'clock in the evening the election was still in doubt. Seymour walked down to the little telegraph office in the village to find out the latest news. Theodora, taking her violin, went into the great dark ballroom and with a single candle resting on the console before a huge mirror, began to play. Never had it seemed to her that she was more palpitating of emotion than at that hour. The night before, she had seen with feminine prescience that Fermor was falling in love with her very rapidly. She felt like a queen who, having been dethroned, and discrowned, was returning in triumph to her kingdom, once more to be crowned and enthroned.

Through her violin she could express all the excitement, the tumult, the longing, the regret, that was in her soul. Always, no matter how bright the

music, with which she began playing, it ever came to the plaintive and the imaginative note. In the beginning she had dashed into one of Brahms' characteristic compositions, full of a rich and resonant rhythm, ringing with passion and riotous in colour. When she finished she sat down in a great chair, resting her violin in her lap, and breathing quickly with a half smile upon her lips. In the midst of the darkness of the vast apartment, the little gleam of the candle was a mere point of light, reflected endlessly in the mirrors. Theodora's eyes, accustomed to the darkness, could see the faint outline of her own white figure revealed in the mirrors, and everywhere was that tiny gleam of light close to her face. Presently, she drew her bow softly over the strings, and then began an *andante* by Beethoven, touching in its harmonies and melodies, simple in its classic beauty, controlled in its deep feeling. She had thought the door of the great dark ballroom closed, but a passing wind had opened it slightly and a little thread of light stole in. Up to the door came Fermor, guided by the delicate strains of the music. He came in noislessly and closed the door behind him without the least sound. Theodora had risen, and was moving slowly across the floor as she played. It reminded Fermor of the first day he had ever seen her, when the strains of her violin reached him on the sunny balcony. He was strongly susceptible to music, and the sweet thrilling of the strings as Theodora played, spoke from her soul to his. She was like the

very spirit of music, as her white figure moved back and forth in the dimness. The candle burning in the tall silver candlestick made the darkness visible, and revealed Theodora's shadowy presence in the great dark mirrors upon the wall.

Theodora continued to draw her bow plaintively across the strings, improvising as if she were telling her own story to the violin. At last, she struck some rich double notes, with an echo of hope in them, and a note of rapture.

The hour, the scene, the time, the woman, would have appealed to most men, and it appealed powerfully to Fermor. He was so used to that stony self-control which goes with English blood, that he gave no outward sign of the stirring of his heart. He became more acutely conscious of that singular unlikeness of Theodora to the other women he had known. Even in her violin playing she was *sui generis*. She had the most delicate arms and hands Fermor had ever seen, and a slight figure, but she had mastered and tamed the violin, the wildest and strongest instrument in the world.

Everywhere, with this type of woman, in the midst of delicacy was found unexpected strength. The more Fermor saw of Theodora, the more he recognised her unlikeness to any other woman he had ever known. He had already paid her the compliment of forgetting all other women. Even Flora Bellenden had faded out of his mind and remained only a hateful and humiliating memory.

After ten minutes Theodora stopped playing, ending with a beautiful little cadenza, bright and sharp and sweet. Then, laying her violin down on the piano, she sank into a corner of one of the long sofas that lined the wall. She did not know of Fermor's presence until he stood before her smiling in the shadowy darkness and said:

"Forgive me for listening, but I love your music."

Theodora did not spring up startled, as Fermor expected she would. Her mind had been so full of him and she was so wrought upon by her fancies that it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should appear. She held out the slim little hand that had wielded the strong bow, and said with smiling composure:

"I had a strange feeling as if someone were listening; someone who understood."

Her eyes, accustomed to the gloom of the great apartment, saw something in Fermor's face that indicated satisfaction and relief.

"You have good news," she said.

"Yes," answered Fermor, seating himself by her side, "I won by a frightfully close vote."

Theodora impulsively put her hand in his with what seemed to Fermor a frank friendliness. It was encouraging or discouraging, according to what he required of the woman whom he was to marry, but Fermor retained the soft hand. Theodora had meant to ask him many questions, and Fermor had much to tell her, but all at once everything vanished from

them except that they were alone together. From Fermor came the whispered words of a lover, and from Theodora, the silence of the woman who loves. Fermor drew her to his strong-beating heart, and Theodora's sweet surrender told him all he wished to know.

They knew not how long they had remained in this soft dream, when a breeze from an open window suddenly blew the door of the ballroom wide open and extinguished the single candle. Fermor, holding Theodora's hand in his, led her straight to the door in spite of the darkness.

"I always loved this room when I was a little chap," he said. "I can remember perfectly well seeing my mother dancing in this room in a ball given in honour of some Royal Highnesses. I was only seven years old, and I thought my mother in her white satin gown, with her tiara, the most beautiful creature in the world. She was not beautiful at all, her pictures show that, but——"

Fermor stopped speaking. They had then reached the door, and Theodora said:

"Since the room is so associated with your mother, don't you think it would be well after—this time next year, we'll say, that you should have a good copy made of your mother's portrait in her court dress and hang it in the ballroom?"

It was the first time that anyone except Fermor had suggested that the smallest honour was due to the late Lady Castlemaine, who, like many other

mediocre women, had made a brilliant and miserable marriage. Nothing Theodora could have said would have been more deeply gratifying to Fermor.

"I should like it above all things," said he, as they walked through the hall and across to the drawing-room. "The memory of my mother is dear to me, and if she had lived I would have tried to make up to her for some of the sorrows she suffered. A woman may be a countess and entertain Royal Highnesses, and at the same time be very badly used in many ways."

In a moment more Seymour entered the drawing-room, and there was much hearty congratulation.

Theodora rang for Reyburn, and when she came in the room, Fermor told her the great news of his election, saying that if her husband had been against him it would probably have defeated him, so narrow was the margin of votes. Reyburn's face softened, as it always did when she looked upon Fermor, and she said:

"My husband doesn't oppose the gentry because they are gentry, but because they think that coals and blankets at Christmas time is all poor people want."

When she had gone out, Seymour pressed Fermor to remain the night, but he felt obliged to decline.

"I am due at Longstaffe to-night and only came over to let Madame Fontarini know the good news,

and that hers might be the first congratulation I received."

It was the first time Fermor had ever spoken of Theodora in the tone of possession, and she blushed with pleasure.

Fermor remained an hour longer. Accustomed as he was to the frank attitude of English *fiancées*, Theodora's reserve was a novelty, but he concluded he rather liked it, remembering the trembling of her hand as he held it, and the vivid colour in her cheeks and her occasionally down-cast eyes.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Comedy of Fate

The unusual has its charm for everybody, and Flora Bellenden was by no means an uninteresting person to Wyndham. It seemed to him that she was in many respects the elemental and primitive woman to a degree far greater than he had ever seen before, and on this primitiveness was superposed a very high degree of artificiality. She expected and submitted to be controlled by her husband in many ways strange to the American, and never dreamed of openly controverting his will, but secretly and slowly she got her own way, by keeping Bellenden in the dark. None was easier to deceive than Bellenden, dull as he was and wishing to believe all his wife told him. Wyndham, accustomed to the American woman's calm defiance of her husband, was interested as a student of human nature in this English relation between husband and wife, which he thought had gone out with stage coaches and packet boats. The singular frankness of the English mind in matters of the highest import, and the equally singular reticence upon the merest trifles, amused and puzzled him. Mrs. Bellenden had a frank contempt scarcely inferior to that of Lady Susan Battle for American men, and an equally frank displeasure

that so many Englishmen should desire American wives.

This was sharply accentuated by what she considered Fermor's perfidy to herself. She expressed something of this to Wyndham one afternoon in the early autumn, when he called at the house in Chester Street. Since the late summer, she had been on the Continent and had just returned to town.

"Every place I went," she complained as she gave Wyndham tea in the drawing-room, "was full of your countrymen and countrywomen. The European men were all flocking around the American women, and so were the American men, for that matter. Englishwomen you know, don't care for American men, which seems a pity, considering the scarcity of men in England."

Wyndham laughed at this depreciation of American men, which is often heard in England. The simplicity of the remark on the part of a lady who was artfully, but elaborately, made up, tickled him.

"The trouble is," he said gravely, "that under your laws and customs, when an unmarried girl meets an unmarried man she either keeps him at arm's length by talking about the weather and the flower show, or she tells him she can't get on with her father, and hates her mother, and virtually makes him an offer of marriage. American men are not accustomed to this sort of thing, and don't know how to take it. So we find the normal English girl

too backward or too forward. We are accustomed, you know, to a girl who treats a man like a doormat one minute, and the next minute acts as if she couldn't live without him, and frankly admits that marriage is a last desperate resort. It is only another cataclysmal difference in attitude of mind between the American and the Englishman."

"I have never seen anything bolder than an American girl," replied Mrs. Bellenden tartly. "I think they trap Englishmen, for, trust me, they are very artful and designing."

Wyndham continued laughing. He was not surprised at the sense of injury that rankled in Mrs. Bellenden's breast. It was certainly something humiliating to find women of another nation coming over in droves to England and carrying the stubborn Englishmen by storm.

"I am told," Mrs. Bellenden kept on, "that all Americans are not rich, but they give themselves the airs of princesses on two- and six-pence."

Wyndham realised more and more the gulf that lies between points of view of the American and the Englishman, a gulf more surprising because of their strong superficial resemblance, and their community of language, laws and literature. But Englishwomen were not without their charm to Wyndham, especially Jane Battle. The women of an older race and civilisation vividly presented to him the strange anomaly of being really like children. When they began to think and reason for themselves they cast off all

interdependence, so to speak, with men, and became violent social agitators. When they wished for social liberty they abandoned family ties and went down single-handed into the arena and fought with beasts. The idea of a true equality with men seemed unknown to them; there was nothing between submission and defiance.

Wyndham wondered how a girl with the innate good sense, the appealing femininity, of Jane Battle, would develop in the atmosphere of affectionate indulgence, and the unquestioning sovereignty of the home which an American man gives his wife. For Wyndham was very much in love with Jane Battle. It did not, however, prevent him from finding Mrs. Bellenden an interesting study, if not a winning personality. She had for him the interest of the unusual, just as the American woman has the same charm for Englishmen. Mrs. Bellenden's views of things were sure to be totally different from what Wyndham had been accustomed to hear from women.

"I understand," said Mrs. Bellenden, giving Wyndham his second cup of tea, "that Jack Thornycroft is perfectly devoted to your sister. See that he doesn't play fast and loose with her."

At that Wyndham put his cup of tea down, and lay back in his chair, convulsed with his peculiar silent laughter. The idea of any man playing fast and loose with the tall and beautiful and entirely competent Dot, was delightfully amusing to him.

Mrs. Bellenden thought that Wyndham's putting his cup down meant that his tea was not right, and she said in a complaining voice:

"Really, I haven't had tea properly served since the new butler came."

"Why don't you discharge him?" asked Wyndham, regaining his gravity.

"Because Mr. Bellenden engaged him, of course," replied Mrs. Bellenden with some surprise.

Wyndham took out his notebook and carefully wrote:

"In England the gentleman of the house engages the butler, and discharges him, I presume?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Bellenden.

"I shouldn't like to stand in the shoes of an American husband who took the liberty of engaging a butler," replied Wyndham.

"Who, then, in America engages the butler?" asked Mrs. Bellenden, wonderingly.

"The mistress of the house. The head of the house, or rather the figurehead of the house, doesn't see the butler until he is already engaged in his duties."

"I shouldn't like the responsibility," replied Mrs. Bellenden positively.

Wyndham said no more, seeing that the whole question involved endless complications with an impossibility of understanding on both sides.

Flora Bellenden, however, had her secret grievance against Americans, and asked Wyndham if he

had seen anything lately of Mr. Seymour and his daughter, Madame Fontarini.

"Not since I visited them in the summer," replied Wyndham. "My sister, however, has been down and spent some days at King's Lyndon."

Then he proceeded to describe the beauties and glories of the rehabilitated King's Lyndon, and spoke with enthusiasm of Madame Fontarini's grace and charm, which were enhanced by the splendour of her environment.

Nothing Wyndham could have said would have disquieted and angered Mrs. Bellenden more than this.

"Do you let your sister go off and visit people like that without knowing anything about them?" she asked.

Her eyes were certainly very handsome and could convey those elemental passions by which she was ruled. In them Wyndham saw clearly hatred of Seymour and Madame Fontarini.

"They know as much about us as we know about them," he answered. "We judge for ourselves. Most people, especially men, find Madame Fontarini charming. So do I. But Mr. Seymour has a peculiar interest for me. He is a long way off from a fool, and yet has a very singular simplicity. Still when one considers that although he became rich by an accident, he says, he seems to manage his money with great judgment, or rather with conservatism. He spends liberally, but I don't think that any-

body could do him, as you say in England. Bunco is the word we use in America."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Bellenden slowly, "he is the escaped criminal whom you are trying to trace."

It was a chance shot, but it gave Wyndham a great and sudden shock. He immediately turned the conversation and would say no more about Mr. Seymour and Madame Fontarini. Presently he got up to go, and Mrs. Bellenden was left alone.

It has been said that no one knows what pain is who has not suffered jealousy. What Wyndham had told her of the beauty of King's Lyndon, was like salt upon an open wound. It was she who ought by rights to be mistress of that stately abode. Her tall striking figure would suit those large and lofty rooms much better than the insignificant little American, for so Mrs. Bellenden characterised Theodora's slight and delicate person. And Fermor—how insipid, how disappointing was life without the excitement, nay, the very risk and danger, of that affair! How ridiculous was his objection to divorce! Why should her life have been spoiled on account of an absurd quixotic sentiment against divorce on Fermor's part! He was no better than other men, yet he professed some of the scruples of the sternest moralist, the religious fanatic, where marriage was concerned. No doubt Seymour was an adventurer with a handsome daughter, for whom he had secured a distinguished name, and finally they had robbed her of Fermor. At that juncture,

Tom Bellenden came in and was met with complaints of the butler. For in Flora Bellenden's mind the great and the small were mixed inexorably, and all the proportions of things had ever been hopelessly confused.

Wyndham, after leaving the Chester Street house, walked as in a dream along the street in the dull London atmosphere of an autumn afternoon. Not once until that moment had he connected Seymour with the ghastly story he was pursuing. There were some points of resemblance, but others totally at variance. The man in question was not married at the time that Theodora must have been born; and was it possible that this mild, humbly voiced Seymour could have struck a deadly blow to any man?

Wyndham could not bring himself to think this, but the possibility once suggested to him, he desired to get rid of it, and by way of clearing his own mind concerning Seymour, went into the search with redoubled zest. He wrote that day a number of letters to America, and began going all over the history of the case which had acquired for him an extraordinary interest.

Wyndham and Dot remained the whole autumn in London. Wyndham's reason was obvious; the Battles were in their great Queen's Gate house for the winter. Dot was engaged in a conscientious sightseeing which would have taxed the physique of a prize fighter but which she accomplished without so much as a headache, or even a footache. Cap-

tain John Thornycroft had been advanced to the favour of being called "Jack" by the adorable Dot, who otherwise treated him with majestic indifference. This was something new to this highly eligible heir to a baronetcy, and as attractive to him as Theodora's calm ignoring of Lord Fermor's rank had been to the much-chased future Earl of Castlemaine. Jack Thornycroft was hopelessly and helplessly in love with Dot Wyndham, but this seemed to have in it no element of novelty to that imposing young person of nineteen. Neither Wyndham nor Dot had been invited to call in Queen's Gate, but there were many chance meetings between Wyndham and Jane Battle. Something like a silent conspiracy to see each other as often as possible existed between them. When Jane took her morning walk in the Park, Wyndham generally turned up, and after Jane had conscientiously told this to Lady Susan, she was directed to walk in another part of the Park. But by some occult means Wyndham was sure to find it out, and frequented the same region. The Battles went to the theatre on Monday nights when they went at all, and on those evenings Wyndham made a point of looking in at all the playhouses where the domestic dramas were being performed, and seldom failed of having a word with Jane.

All this was most exasperating to Lady Susan, who, with renewed energy, looked about her for an eligible bachelor peer upon whom to bestow Jane. But eligible bachelor peers are scarce and are not for

the Jane Battles of this world. To add to this was the obvious fact that Jack Thornycroft was hopelessly in the foils of Dot Wyndham, so that Lady Susan's dissatisfaction was very great.

Wyndham was still working hard upon his theories concerning the man he was seeking, and the further he penetrated into the maze the more puzzled he was. To add to his perplexities, he found, by that psychic action which makes one force influence another force widely remote, that another newspaper besides his own was looking into the mysterious case. Wyndham was sorry that he had ever heard of it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The Battles of the Spirit

The autumn at King's Lyndon was unusually mild and sunny. The work in the great house progressed so well that by December it was in a beautiful state of restoration. The long and lofty picture gallery still remained empty, and there were few works of art to replace those which had been eaten and drunk, so to speak, by Lord Castlemaine, but Theodora wisely determined not to buy pictures rashly.

Beyond the general suspicion afloat in the county and in London that Lord Fermor might eventually come once more into possession of his own through Seymour's millions, nothing was known of any marriage engagement with Madame Fontarini. The meeting of Parliament in October kept Fermor busy, and it was arranged between Theodora and himself that his visits to King's Lyndon would take place when no one else was there. Fermor had no fancy for letting the world know that he was in a state of suspension, and probation, as it were, and Theodora had an equal aversion to public speculation upon her affairs. It was settled, however, that the engagement should be announced the first of the year and the marriage take place the middle of January, very quietly.

Theodora made several visits to London, and each time she saw Father White. The state of uncertainty in her mind was very great, and when she tried to speak with Fermor about it, he said smiling:

"I was brought up to believe that it was very un-English to speculate upon religion, and that people in good society ought not to study the Thirty-nine Articles, but simply accept them."

They were walking together up and down the long terrace in the sombre, still autumn afternoon, as they talked.

"But have you not in your reading, especially when you were at Oxford, become interested in what one may call the philosophy of religion?" asked Theodora.

"No," answered Fermor. "My mind is not of that cast. It is, I think, purely economic and governmental. I have been all my life studying how things could be improved by legislation, and that has not left much room for anything else. When I was a Guardsman I spent my leisure in studying Erskine Mayo."

"Who is Erskine Mayo?"

"Oh, he's a fellow who wrote a lot about parliamentary usage. I shall find Erskine Mayo's book very convenient now."

"But have you no thoughts or aspirations beyond this world?" persisted Theodora, looking at Fermor with wondering eyes.

"Yes."

"Don't you feel the want of help and enlightenment?"

"Very much up to a certain point—that is to say, when I began to think that you would marry me. But although I have been until now an idler, I know myself to be by nature a man of action. When I live decently and try to be a gentleman in soul as well as in manners, I feel at ease in mind. I leave the rest to the God who made me. That is my creed. Not at all a speculative one, as you will see, but plain and practical."

Theodora looked down, and sighed. Would he ever be in sympathy with her on those points, or would she, after her marriage, still be compelled to turn to Ashburton and Father White for an understanding of her soul?

"There is one point, however," she said after a pause, "upon which I should like very much to know your feelings. It is the sacramental idea of marriage. In my former marriage, I was the most disappointed and wretched of women and felt myself degraded by being the wife of a man like Pietro Fontarini. But the idea of dissolving the marriage never occurred to me, and I assure you I could have died with less fear and reluctance than have been divorced and remarried. Sometimes persons, meaning to be kind, suggested a divorce to me, and that I might know new happiness in another marriage, but I felt myself so insulted by the idea that I never

even retained those mistaken friends as friends afterward."

"In this," answered Fermor promptly, "we are entirely of the same opinion. I can't say that I have the sacramental idea of marriage that you have, but it seems to me to be a contract of such infinite delicacy, of such stupendous importance, that as a mere civil contract, it must be maintained at all cost. I have been called dogmatic and fanatical in discussing this matter, and perhaps I am, but I have no fancy for the experimental marriage."

There was no doubt of Fermor's entire sympathy with Theodora on that point. Both had that genius for constancy which often takes the place of law, and by a singular coincidence each had cherished a high ideal of marriage under a strain fiercer than that which causes many men and women to break away from a miserable marriage.

While Fermor was speaking, the hateful memory of Flora Bellenden rose to his mind. But as Theodora's link with the man she hated was to her indissoluble, so to Fermor, even in his first impetuous passion, when Mrs. Bellenden was to him an aberration and an evil charm, the thought of conferring upon her the name of wife had never seemed possible to him. He was not a casuist and he had never denied, even to himself, his evil behaviour, but to him it would have been made ten thousand times worse by putting on it the name of marriage; it would be like issuing false coin, or introducing a marked

card. He felt the more drawn to Theodora by seeing in her a sublimated ideal of marriage, but the sacramental marriage was new to him.

After a pause, Theodora said:

"I have seen a Roman Catholic priest several times lately when I have been in London, Father White, Major Ashburton's friend. Roman Catholics alone believe marriage to be a sacrament, and that makes a very strong appeal to me for the Roman Catholic religion."

Fermor remained silent. They continued to walk up and down the terrace. The landscape had the austere beauty of the season and the lake lay bathed in a coppery glow from the declining sun. Theodora felt, with a sinking heart, that Fermor's silence was the silence of displeasure.

The idea of Theodora giving her confidences to another man was not pleasant to Fermor's British mind, but he knew not exactly how to object, and, after all, Father White was indorsed by Ashburton, and that went a great way with Fermor.

Then, with a heart still disturbed, but full of courage, Theodora said:

"I should wish the marriage between us to be performed by the Roman Catholic form, because it is sacramental."

Fermor liked this still less. If Theodora had been an Englishwoman he would have expressed this dislike frankly, but his study of Theodora's character had shown him so great an unlikeness to all the other

women he had ever known, that he was guarded in his procedure. She seemed, as in the matter of the engagement and many other things, to reason calmly upon a proposition, to take a stand, and then to tell him of it, and expect his acquiescence. As her decision always seemed to be fixed in advance, the question of opposition became difficult. But for all that, Fermor felt stirring within him that complaisance of the man toward a woman, admired and loved.

Fermor had the reserve of a perfectly sincere man in making professions of love to a woman who brought with her a great fortune, and for whom he felt, from the first moment he met her, profound respect. Each was on guard, as it were, against the other, to conceal the exaltation of passion.

Theodora gave a glance at Fermor, who had put on the impenetrable English mask, which indicates displeasure.

"Would you object to our being married by the Roman Catholic service?" she asked presently.

Fermor smiled, as he replied:

"You are putting me in a delicate position. It is not to be supposed that a gentleman would object to any method which unites him with a lady whom he wishes to marry."

"That sounds very well," replied Theodora calmly, "but judging by what I have seen of Englishmen, they have no hesitation in expressing their objections and wishes, even to the ladies whom they are about to marry."

This was true, but Fermor could hardly explain that an American was a very different person to deal with from a woman of his own country.

Theodora, with the American nimbleness of mind, saw at once what Fermor's real feelings were, and proceeded to think out for herself with the rapidity which always startled Fermor, what she should do. The sun became a huge red disk on the edge of the horizon, and a delicate grey mist was rising from the brown earth, and enveloping the rolling stretches of the park, the great naked trees, shivering and complaining in the autumn wind, and the clumps of evergreens. As Fermor watched Theodora's look of concentrated reflection, he knew that when she spoke something positive would have been decided, and he was secretly amused at himself, knowing that he would be forced to accept Theodora's theories, or—give her up.

After ten minutes of silence, Theodora spoke.

"I see that you don't like the idea of being married by the Roman Catholic ritual, and I see the delicacy of your position. Believe me, I would not seem to exert the slightest influence over your will, but——"

Here she stopped in the walk and turned her dark eyes full upon Fermor, with deep meaning and resolution in them.

"I can't—I can't give up this sacramental marriage. I would give more than you would think possible, to be married in a church where I feel that

Jesus Himself is present on the altar. That is impossible, but it is possible to be married here, at King's Lyndon, by Father White. Every time I see Father White I advance a step nearer to becoming a Roman Catholic, accepting what I can, and praying for light upon the rest. One thing is certain. My mind, my will, my soul, are all possessed by the belief in the Real Presence, and in the sacramental nature of marriage, and they are two forces drawing me very fast toward the Roman Catholic Church."

This was positive enough in all conscience.

Fermor took time, too, to make his reply, and then said in a manner, kind, yet cold:

"Perhaps I am not a qualified person to determine upon those matters. It is certain that the position of a recruit to the Roman Catholic Church is not pleasant in England. I am not thinking wholly of myself in this matter, but of you, and since you so frankly admit Father White's influence over you, it can't surprise you that I am not entirely pleased at the thought of another man having ascendency over your mind—an intellectual ascendency, which I am afraid I can never acquire."

Every word spoken by Fermor showed Theodora more and more that, near as they were in their common belief on the subject of marriage, there was a gulf between them in their practice. She sighed a little, and they resumed their quiet walk. The twilight was coming on apace, and the sun was quite gone, leaving a line of blazing light on the horizon

that was fast sinking in the purple shadows of the evening sky.

"It might have been better," said Theodora presently, with a melancholy little smile, "if you had chosen to marry an Englishwoman. They carry the theory of submission much farther than we do. There is such a tremendous amount of submission in every woman that I think I could carry it to the very verge of conscience. But this—this is a matter of conscience."

"That settles it," answered Fermor, relaxing a little. "When the word conscience comes into a discussion, everything is ended, especially with a woman, and a woman like you. I shall say no more. I can't prevent the world from saying things, and I am afraid it will make your position a little difficult with my family."

"I don't see how that can be," answered Theodora in a soft, cool voice. "What can they do to me?"

"Say disagreeable things at you."

"Then I shall keep away from them and make them keep away from me."

"You will find my aunt, Lady Susan Battle, charging down on you in spite of everything."

"Let her try it once," replied Theodora.

Fermor laughed a little, and said he hoped he should be on hand to see the encounter, having no fears that Theodora could hold her own against Lady Susan.

It was then quite dark and they entered the house

where Theodora gave Fermor and her father tea in the little yellow morning room. The room was so closely associated in Fermor's mind with his mother, that it exercised a kind of spell upon him, making him gentle. Many little things had been left in the room which reminded him of the dead Lady Castlemaine. Upon a small cabinet were collected some quaint Dresden shepherds and shepherdesses, and other small ornaments found among the *débris* of the house. It seemed to Fermor as if it were a sort of shrine to his mother's memory.

It would seem as if Theodora were trying all her softest arts to reconcile Fermor to what she had determined upon doing. Nothing could exceed the graciousness of her manner toward him, and when they had finished tea, she rose and, going to the cabinet, pulled out a drawer with a book of old music in it. Fermor recognised the book at once, and said:

"I remember all those old-fashioned waltzes and airs my mother used to play. I have not heard them since I was a child."

Theodora went to the piano and, opening the book, played the simple music with much sweetness and expression. Her piano playing in no way compared with her violin playing, but was extremely pretty and expressive. The spell became complete. Fermor felt, as on previous occasions, that he had no power of resistance against influences so sweet and appealing, and an artfulness which was so feminine and profound.

Fermor could not remain to dinner, but when, about seven o'clock, he was going, Seymour went out of the room, leaving him and Theodora to themselves.

"I hope," said Theodora, "you are not hurt or offended by what I said, or what I feel obliged to do, as I explained to you."

"Not in the least," replied Fermor with much sincerity. "I have told you what I think. That is all."

"Father White has no more ascendency over me than Plato may be said to have, or Pascal, or even Amiel. Amiel had a great influence over me until lately. I accepted his gentle despair, the feeling that came over him at the end that life meant, 'To appear, to struggle, to disappear.' It added to my unhappiness, for I believed it. Looking back over it all, I don't know why I ever should have entered the open door of a church. I certainly had no faith, or even belief. But once I had entered, I could not keep away."

Fermor replied with his usual calm courtesy.

"The chief thing is that I shall have the privilege of making you my wife. All I have said has been with a view to making your position pleasanter. I shall say nothing more upon the mode of our marriage, but you may command me."

Theodora knew how to repay this. They were standing together before the fireplace, the sparkling firelight falling on Theodora's perplexed face. She

turned to Fermor, her eyes downcast, and slipping her hand into his, leaned toward him. Their lips met as lovers. Theodora's slender arm stole about Fermor's neck in the first unsought caress she had ever given him. Their souls rushed together; each felt an infinite patience and tenderness for the other; all was peace between them.

As Fermor rode back through the frosty evening to Longstaffe he smiled grimly to himself at the manner in which he had been defeated at every point. The whole thing was altogether novel; there were unexpected turns and twists, where he had supposed he would travel the broad highway and dead level of the commonplace. At every moment he was made to feel that it was entirely optional with him to give up the marriage altogether. Had Theodora been an Englishwoman, he would have been held to his engagement as strictly as a bank exacts payment of a note. But in the present case, although an accepted lover, he was still in the position of a suitor. Then the realisation come over him of Theodora's eyes, darkly soft, uplifted to his, the touch of her little hand, the quickened beating of his heart as he held her to him. He fell into a delicious reverie, and the quick gallop of his horse along the dark highroad became a slow walk. Fermor had a strong imagination and saw before him the sweetest vision in the world—a perfect marriage.

Fermor all along had felt himself sliding softly in love with her and he began to wonder if that event

had not already happened. He wondered whether Theodora were at all in love with him.

As he dismounted in front of his own door and walked into the large, cold, dimly lighted mansion, the picture of Theodora in his mother's little yellow room and the echo of the music seemed very attractive to him. He felt no aversion to the idea of being married—which is a rare thing with an Englishman with a courtesy title. He had almost forgotten the existence of Flora Bellenden.

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Darkness and the Light

But Flora Bellenden had by no means forgotten Lord Fermor. Envy and ennui, two deadly foes to a woman's peace, haunted her. She had relished the fact that for years she stood, like a lioness in the path, between ambitious mothers and daughters, and Fermor's prospective coronet; and then had come this insignificant American, for so Mrs. Bellenden characterised Theodora Fontarini; and—all was over. She grasped eagerly at the idea that something was wrong about Seymour, and was convinced, without investigation, that not only he, but his money, was tainted with villainy. Tom Bellenden, the most patient of men, found his domestic hearth a very unpleasant place in those autumn days.

One afternoon, late in December, Wyndham was passing Mrs. Bellenden's door just as she alighted from her brougham. She was looking very handsome in her large, artificial way, with her velvet and furs, and Wyndham, who was no more proof than any other man against a good-looking woman, accepted her peremptory invitation to come in and have tea with her.

When they reached the drawing-room, and Mrs. Bellenden threw aside her satin cloak, Wyndham

noticed a diamond pendant sparkling upon her breast. But he soon forgot it in the interesting programme of tea. Mrs. Bellenden at once began upon a subject which was plainly distasteful to Wyndham —the questions as to whether Seymour were the man for whom the authorities and some amateurs had been hunting for twenty years. Wyndham parried Mrs. Bellenden very ably, but he could not get her off the subject. It shortened his visit, and when he rose, Mrs. Bellenden was still plaguing him on the subject.

"Really," he said coolly, "I can't discuss this matter any further. My sister and I have received much kindness from Mr. Seymour and Madame Fontarini, and it would be an infamy for me to question Mr. Seymour's former life in any way."

As Wyndham stood looking at Mrs. Bellenden, she put her hand to her throat and her face grew pale.

"My pendant," she said, "it is lost."

"No, it is not," replied Wyndham, "I noticed you had it on when you threw off your cloak. It has merely dropped on the floor."

At that moment Tom Bellenden came in from the further room and shook hands with Wyndham, whom he sincerely liked. Mrs. Bellenden's pallor and trembling was obvious to even honest, dull Tom Bellenden, for she loved her diamonds as mothers love their children. She went out of the room quickly and began searching carefully, the carpeted stairs,

"Mrs. Bellenden has dropped her diamond pendant somewhere in the house," explained Wyndham, beginning to examine about the room.

Tom Bellenden joined in the search, ringing the bell meanwhile for the footman. Outside the door they heard the man coming up the stairs and Mrs. Bellenden accosting him.

"You are not wanted," she said, "the bell was rung by mistake."

The man went away and Bellenden came out on the landing and said to his wife:

"I rang the bell for James to help look for your pendant."

"It is better not to tell the servants it is lost until we have looked for it," she said. She was trembling and even weeping, and Bellenden, putting his hand kindly on her arm, said:

"Don't fret yourself so about it; after all it was only paste and I can afford to give you another."

At this, Mrs. Bellenden made an effort to recover herself.

"Yes," she said, "it was only paste, but I liked it."

She continued to search nervously upstairs and down for the trinket, and was assisted by her husband and Wyndham. But the pendant could not be found. Her nervousness and agitation could not be concealed, and increased every moment. Wyndham having helped all he could in the unavailing hunt, took his leave, assuring Mrs. Bellenden that the

ornament must eventually be found in the drawing-room.

Bellenden tried to persuade his wife to give over the search or to let the servants assist, but she obstinately refused. She walked about the drawing-room, now lighted up, and shook the curtains, and moved sofa pillows and looked again and again in the same spot as if unable to persuade herself that the trinket was gone. Bellenden, standing on the hearth rug, watched her, a faint suspicion dawning upon his dull mind. Mrs. Bellenden left the room and began again the fourth or fifth search of the stairs. Half a minute after she went out, Bellenden, glancing downward, saw under the cover of the tea tray, the pendant, where it had dropped from his wife's throat, and had slipped under the tray cover. He took the trinket to the light to examine it, recalling his wife's having shown it to him on the day of Fermor's last visit. She had said that it cost but ten pounds, and he had rather disapproved of it as being too glittering a sham. Now as he turned it over in his hand, it occurred to him that it was not a sham, but a splendid and costly ornament. He put it quietly in his pocket and going out in the street called a cab and drove to one of the big jewelry shops in Bond Street. Going in, he asked to see the manager. The man appeared, and Bellenden inquired of him the probable value of the ornament.

The manager, turning it over in his hand, smiled and shook his head.

"It is a doubtful business appraising diamonds off-hand, but I sold a pendant of very much the same style as this, with the same number of stones and none larger, for four hundred pounds, and considered it cheap."

"Thank you," said Bellenden, going out.

When he reached home it was near dinner time. He went straight to his wife's room and knocked, and receiving no answer, entered.

She was huddled, still in her street dress, upon a sofa, and was weeping violently. The barbaric love of splendour which was very marked in her, revealed itself with great intensity in the loss of the jewels; she lamented them as a woman laments a lost child. When her husband came up to her and she saw the glittering thing in his hand, the joy of recovering it overcame both her prudence and her fear. She uttered a little cry and held out her hand to seize the trinket, but Bellenden held on to it. His stolid, usually good-natured face wore an expression she had never seen before—an expression of rage and menace. He held the ornament in his hand and said to her slowly:

"I understand it all. You lied to me when you said it was paste."

There had always been in Flora Bellenden's mind a latent fear of this easy-going, indulgent husband. She felt it now so much that it kept her silent, while her face grew pale under her rouge. Bellenden seized her arm in a grip unconsciously hard, raised

her to her feet and led her to a writing-desk in the room.

"Put this thing up and address it in your own handwriting to Lord Fermor immediately."

The thought of giving up the diamonds was heart-breaking to this woman who loved them so passionately. But she knew it was useless to make any protest. With trembling hands, she put the pendant in a box, tied, sealed and addressed it under the compulsion of her husband's eye. Then he said:

"Put on your hat and come with me."

Usually Mrs. Bellenden was extremely fluent, but not to-night. A new force represented by the supposed fury in Bellenden's eyes, his stern grip of her arm, had come into her life. She put on a hat, threw a cloak around her, and went downstairs and out in the street with her husband, who carried the little parcel in his hand. She walked with him a few squares until they came to a dingy little postoffice. Rage was in her heart against both her husband and Fermor, but most against her husband. It seemed as if the last ignominy was offered her in making her come like a servant to do an errand.

But she dare not protest. She stood by the little barred window while a pale and wearied clerk took the parcel and handed the postoffice receipt to Bellenden, who put it in his pocket. Then the husband and wife, hating each other, walked back through the night to the Chester Street house. Bellenden, whose ideas were few, and whose words were fewer, said not

one word. He could not have expressed to save his life, a tithe of the emotions that agitated his silent and sombre nature.

Once in the house, Mrs. Bellenden, with silent fury in her face, excused herself from dinner and went to her room. Bellenden said he would go to his club for dinner. Instead, he walked through the gloomy night toward the Thames embankment. He found himself leaning over the parapet, looking at the black and turbid water upon which the electric light glared fiercely. He gazed at it so long and so moodily that a policeman close by came nearer and kept a watchful eye upon him.

Bellenden turned and saw the guardian of the peace, who radiated suspicion in every glance and attitude. By an effort, Bellenden pulled himself together, and stepping into a cab, was driven to his club. He could not recall to save his life, whether he had dined or not—a thing least likely of all for Tom Bellenden to forget.

In the Chester Street house, Mrs. Bellenden, in a frenzy, walked up and down in her room. It was small, and she felt caged in it and went into the dimly lighted drawing-room. The house was not well ordered, and the room still bore evidences of having been thoroughly ransacked. Involuntarily, Mrs. Bellenden moved a chair in place, and then, it was her turn to find something—a small newspaper rolled into a wad. It was an American newspaper, and as such, of no interest to Mrs. Bellenden; but as

she was about to throw it in the fire, her eye caught a marked column. She read it, and re-read it, her face changing from sullen agitation to an expression of triumph.

Ten minutes later, she rang for a cab, and drove to a different postoffice from the one to which she had been dragged by her husband. He had taught her, however, how to insure the delivery of a valuable package. In her hand she carried a little parcel, addressed to Lord Castlemaine, at Monte Carlo, which she registered as coming from A. N. Wyndham, who might be man, woman or devil, as far as the postoffice clerk knew. She herself dropped the newspaper in the postoffice box and returned home with a sense of victory. At least she was not the only one to be humiliated, angered and degraded.

Wyndham went back to his hotel, where he dined with his sister, and the two went to the play. After bringing Dot back to the hotel, Wyndham dropped in at his club. Only then did he miss his newspaper. He was deeply chagrined and even alarmed at its loss. He made such efforts as he could to recover it, feeling the hopelessness of it, and sent early next morning to Chester Street to ask if he had left the newspaper there. In reply, he got a note from Mrs. Bellenden, saying no one in the house had seen it. A conviction instantly developed in Wyndham's mind that Mrs. Bellenden had the newspaper. In anger, he determined not to go to Chester Street again.

Next morning, Fermor received a parcel, with

other letters and parcels. The first letter he opened was one in Theodora's delicate but firm handwriting. In it, she wrote him briefly that she found herself impelled to unite with the Roman Catholic communion. She had her father's approval, but, as a matter of fact, it was with her so entirely a question of the soul, that she had not asked her father's consent. She hoped she had Fermor's approval. If the step she was about to take seriously displeased him, she would regret his displeasure, and give him his freedom. But if he did not disapprove of it, and their marriage took place, she would endeavour to act so that he would never have cause to regret his kind compliance. She was to be received into the Roman Catholic Church the next morning at Hillborough by Father Redcliffe.

Fermor reflected over this letter, and smiled at the ever-available proposition to give him up—a proposition a trifle more novel to the heir of an earldom than, as in Jack Thornycroft's case, to one who was only heir to a baronetcy. Apparently, the possibility that Theodora might, by her act, injure Fermor's political career, had not been taken seriously by her. Fermor, however, knew perfectly well that she had dealt him a hard blow, so far as his political prospects went. Nevertheless, he wrote immediately to her, before opening his other letters, a note of graceful and tender acquiescence. It was more nearly a love letter than he had yet written her.

Then he recognised on the parcel Flora Bellenden's hated handwriting. He was almost as chagrined at getting the diamonds back as Mrs. Bellenden was at giving them up. The pendant was worth all of the four hundred pounds he had paid for it, and for which he had cramped himself. It was, of course, out of the question that he should give it to Theodora, and he disliked the idea of selling it. At last he thought of Ashburton, who gave liberally of his own money to charity, and could no doubt find use for more in the same cause. Fermor went up to London and saw Ashburton at his lodgings, and made a clean breast, handing, or rather throwing, the ornament down on Ashburton's table, saying:

"Here, take the damned, infernal thing, and sell it, and do what you please with the money."

Ashburton smiled his quiet smile.

"Yes," he replied, "the thing is both damned and infernal. However, I can give Barotti's boy the benefit of it by sending him to Italy. The lad has not been strong since he had scarlet fever, and it will do him a world of good. Besides, there are several other useful things which can be done with the money—four hundred pounds is a considerable sum to give, either to God or the devil."

Then Fermor mentioned Theodora's brief letter, announcing what she had by that time already done.

"Of course you are pleased," said Fermor, smiling rather ruefully.

"Yes," replied Ashburton, "it is a good thing for

you morally, but I am afraid a bad thing for you politically. However, all depends upon the relative value you put on morals and politics."

"I daresay you think me a confounded hypocrite, but no Roman Catholic has more radical views, or rather adamantine prejudices, than I have on the subject of marriage. I would not marry any woman who contemplated the possibility of divorce. Madame Fontarini's feelings on that point are perfectly acceptable to me. So, as far as I am concerned, the marriage will take place on the fifth of February, as arranged. No announcement will be made until the middle of January, but I have written the date to my father, so he can, if he wishes, return from the Riviera in time to be present at the ceremony."

Fermor returned to Longstaffe, meditating in the train upon the exact amount of political damage Theodora's act would do him. But the thought of that sweet twilight hour in Theodora's sitting-room, the reserved yet poignant passion of her delicate caress, banished all regrets, all contrary wishes. He could even laugh silently in contemplation of Lord Castlemaine's disgust and Lady Susan Battle's alarm at the notion of the future Lady Fermor being a Roman Catholic.

As for Lord Castlemaine, he was at that moment enjoying Monte Carlo as a robust and intelligent pagan naturally would. It was his intention, originally, to return to England in time for Lord Fermor's wedding. But the dinners at Monte Carlo

had been too good. Lord Castlemaine, for the first time in his life, felt that he had a pair of legs vulnerable to gout. With his usual prompt decision, he left Monte Carlo, and much to the disgust of his valet, went to a little place not far from Grenoble, where the air was good, the diet simple, and everybody went to bed at ten o'clock. He took with him an immense mass of books, and amused himself with the prospect of heckling his friends in the Government on the Education Bill, as soon as he returned to London. Being an intellectual debauchee, he gave himself over, in his quiet lodging in the little hotel, to the study of his subject, and took deep drafts of Junius, of Macaulay, of Corbett, of Disraeli, of Lord John Russell, and of Lord Salisbury's earlier speeches. He need not to borrow of any of these fierce parliamentary fighters, but they always gave him inspiration in pure invective. As an able and accomplished scold, Lord Castlemaine was the equal of any, and the superior of most of them. Hard reading, however, acted on him very much like hard eating and drinking, for his gout, instead of growing better, suddenly rose and conquered him.

Within a week of Fermor's wedding, Lord Castlemaine's legs were propped up on a chair, and it looked as if it might be four weeks instead of four days before he could start for England. Nevertheless, he ordered preparations made for his leaving, going by way of Paris.

One morning exactly seven days before the wed-

ding day of Lord Fermor and Theodora, Lord Castlemaine received among a pile of letters and papers, one addressed to him in what was obviously a feigned handwriting. On it were many postmarks and signs of delay, showing it to have gone back to London and to have returned to Monte Carlo. It was the last to be opened, and it contained a marked newspaper article. Lord Castlemaine's valet, who was in the room, heard a suppressed exclamation, and looked toward his master. Lord Castlemaine's purple face had changed into a yellowish pallor. He made a motion with his hand indicating the valet should withdraw, which he promptly proceeded to do. Left alone, Lord Castlemaine collected his faculties with that amazing quickness which made him a terror to both his friends and his enemies. He read the newspaper article—a long one—over half a dozen times. Then he put together many circumstances, some large and some very minute, and the conviction grew in his mind that Seymour had behind him a prison record. Lord Castlemaine loved money as he loved power and good champagne and a battle royal in the House of Lords, but he was not wholly ignoble. He respected the traditions of his house, and was rather proud of the fact that all of his family, except himself, had lived upon a high plane of honour.

Fermor must certainly marry money, but Madame Fontarini was not the only rich woman in the world. The wedding must be stopped at any cost until Sey-

mour's antecedents were investigated. Lord Castlemaine was a very firm believer in atavism, and the thought that he might have grandchildren with criminal tendencies was painful and alarming to him. On the table at his hand were telegraph blanks and a railway guide. He wrote out rapidly a telegram to Fermor and added, "Answer to Paris."

Then ringing for his man, he ordered the despatch sent off at once, and directed that a compartment be engaged for him in the train which left for Paris that evening. The French doctor, appearing just then, made a vigorous protest against the move, but Lord Castlemaine swept him aside.

That evening at ten, when the night train left, Lord Castlemaine was in his compartment, cursing his legs, propped up on the opposite seat; but they had not kept him from starting for Paris. So far from being worse, he was rather the better for the change, and the feeling that he would arrive in England in time to delay the marriage and, if necessary, prevent it, gave him an increase of his tremendous energy.

At eleven o'clock he was trussed up with rugs and pillows and fell into a sleep as calm as a baby's, the best sleep he had known for a month. The next thing he knew was a violent shock, and his valet was thrown across the compartment and something at the same time seemed to strike his head. Then everything was forgotten.

When he came to himself, he was in a room in a

little hotel of a town forty miles from Grenoble, and close to the spot where the accident had occurred.

As soon as he opened his eyes, he remembered everything. A doctor was sitting by his bedside—the Grenoble doctor who had been sent for.

"An accident happened to the train, I presume," said Lord Castlemaine. "I think I have been unconscious some little time—concussion of the brain, I daresay."

"Yes," answered the doctor, smiling, "but no other injury whatever."

"I shall take the train to Paris to-morrow at latest," said Lord Castlemaine, decisively. "I must be in England before the fifth of February."

That was the date fixed for Fermor's wedding.

"To-day is the afternoon of the fifth of February," replied the doctor.

A savage light shone in Lord Castlemaine's eyes and a curse burst from his lips. He was defeated by fate. The doctor, by way of pacifying him, picked up an open telegram from the table and read it. It ran, "Best wishes from Lord and Lady Fermor."

"There was great difficulty in communicating with Lord Fermor," said the doctor encouragingly; "he seems to have had neither letters nor telegrams from you, and thinks you are still at Monte Carlo. I got into communication with him only last night. As you had told me your son was to have been married, I was very careful in what I wired him, and it is

fortunate I did so, because, I think now, your recovery will be rapid."

Lord Castlemaine lay back on his pillow, grinding his teeth; he hated defeat.

On that day, Lord Fermor and Theodora had been quietly married by Father White in the drawing-room at King's Lyndon. The company was as small as might be. There was no best man, no wedding cake, none of the paraphernalia of a grand marriage. The guests consisted of Ashburton, Jane Battle, Wyndham and the tall and lovely Dot, and the Marsacs.

Lady Susan Battle had indignantly refused to be present at what she considered to be nothing more nor less than a Popish plot, and had no intention of allowing any of the Battle girls to attend. But Jane, with a new-found courage, announced that she wished to go, and Fermor, on his last visit to Lady Susan the day before the marriage, boldly backed up Jane, and declared he would call for her that afternoon, and take her down to Longstaffe, with Ashburton and the Marsacs, who were to travel by the same train, and would be his guests for the night. Lady Susan protested, but she had always felt herself unable to resist the prospective head of the house of Castlemaine. She insisted that Lord Castlemaine's mysterious silence for three weeks past was due to his disapproval of the Romish and Popish elements in the marriage, and would scarcely believe Fermor when he assured her that Lord Castlemaine's silence

was nothing unusual, and he would, no doubt, send a letter or even a despatch. Lady Susan was forced to capitulate in the matter of letting Jane go with Fermor, and the girl's bright face was one of the happiest at the wedding.

Although Fermor made light to Lady Susan of Lord Castlemaine's silence, it was, nevertheless, disquieting. True, a handsome gift of emeralds had come for Theodora, but that was an order given a jeweller some time before when Lord Castlemaine was in the first flush of pleasure over the marriage. In spite of what was, from the English point of view, the ignoring of Lord Fermor's rights, the amount of money was so large and so immediately available, that although Lord Castlemaine thought Fermor might have done better, he could certainly have done worse.

On her sunny wedding day, Theodora, for the first time since the death of her child, wore a gown that was neither black nor white, but a faint blue. She looked extraordinarily girlish as she entered the room on her father's arm. Seymour, like most American fathers on such occasions, showed signs of weeping; but there was in his manner a willingness and even joy at what was occurring.

When the short and simple ceremony was over there was a wedding breakfast, also short and simple. All the guests left by the two o'clock train for London.

There was no occasion for a wedding tour or for a

loan of a friend's house. About an hour after the departure of the guests the bride and bridegroom took Seymour to the station. He was off for a month in Scotland.

"One of the things, my dear," he said to Theodora, "which I have always wanted to do, was to explore Scotland in the winter. I couldn't do it on your account, but now that you are off my hands, I am a free man."

"No you are not, papa," said Theodora with the note of affectionate decision which she used toward her father and which Fermor had never known in an English daughter, "you may stay in Scotland one month exactly, then you are to come back, and meanwhile we shall make Barleywood ready for you. Don't think you have achieved your liberty. I shall see you every day, and look after you just as I always have done."

Then the train came thundering in to the little station, and father and daughter kissed and clung to each other with a depth of tenderness that Fermor had never seen before in such a relation, and with tears streaming down the cheeks of each.

Lord and Lady Fermor walked back to King's Lyndon through the gathering gloom of the February afternoon. The Park was bare and brown, and so quiet that the small wild creatures who dwell in wooded solitudes glanced in wonder at the two figures strolling slowly through the dells and bypaths. They were not boy and girl, but a man and a woman

who knew a deeper rapture, a loftier exaltation, a restrained power than first youth can ever know. The wine of life is more effervescing in youth, but it grows in strength and sweetness. Fermor felt, for the first time in his life, a sense of complete controlled joy. Theodora knew that all that had gone before was the very dross of love and life.

They were so quiet and undemonstrative that the servants, who watched them curiously, concluded it was the common exchange of rank for money, and that they were too indifferent to each other to quarrel. But Fermor and Theodora dwelt in the Elysian Fields of the soul that day.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE CRUCIBLE

Lord Fermor had the common superstition of bachelors: that the instant he was married his wife would endeavour by artful means to change all of his bachelor habits, his mode of life, his friends and everything belonging to and relating to him. But he was destined to an agreeable surprise.

After a honeymoon of three weeks, he discovered no effort on Theodora's part to change anything in his life. He loved King's Lyndon so well that nothing was easier or more natural to him than to fall into the ways of proprietorship. He established himself once more in what had been his study, and afterward Seymour's. Reyburn attended him faithfully, as when he was a little boy and afterward when he returned, an Oxonian, home for the Long Vacation.

Every Englishman is supposed on some occasions to utter the national dictum, "I will be master in my own house."

Fermor would have found it difficult to make occasion for saying this. Everything went according to his liking, with order and smoothness, but many things were done with quiet unconsciousness by Lady Fermor which no English wife would have thought of doing without consulting her husband.

Seymour's rooms, announced Theodora in the

assured manner of an American woman who contemplates no opposition, would be kept intact for her father whenever he chose to visit King's Lyndon.

As there were thirty-two other bedrooms in the King's Lyndon house, it was not likely that the Fermors would be pressed for room, and Fermor himself was secretly amused at the way in which two of the most desirable rooms in his house were apportioned without consulting him. The staff of men servants, which in an English establishment would have been absolutely under the discipline of the master of the house, had been trained to report to Theodora. Even the butler, a magnificent personage, had been made to feel in the course of his year's service, that the lady of the house was a source of all authority and the court of last resort. Fermor had inherited the philosophic temper of Lord Castlemaine, and finding King's Lyndon beautifully equipped and well managed, the whole machinery of a large establishment moving without the slightest friction, he concluded that he was well rid of many cares meant to establish the mastery that an Englishman takes upon himself. Outdoor matters, Theodora laid upon Fermor with an apology for so doing. This apology diverted Fermor so much that he laughed aloud, much to Theodora's amazement.

"I have had to manage everything on the whole place," she said; "papa never would decide anything without referring to me, and so it became easier for me to manage directly; but it was a great burden

and I really didn't understand it very well, and so I am only too glad to be rid of it."

This was one evening three weeks after their marriage when they were sitting as usual in the little yellow room. They were a very matter-of-fact bride and bridegroom to outward appearances. Fermor was reading his newspaper and Theodora was cutting the leaves of a new book. Fermor, accustomed to the fortnightly box of novels from Mudie's, which constituted the reading of most ladies in English country houses, was curious to note the kind of literature in which his new wife indulged. She was a most practical person, he discovered, in everyday affairs, and at the same time was given to much speculative and imaginative thought reading. While cutting the leaves of her book, she was giving him some details with regard to the expenditures in the stables. Fermor glanced at the title—it was a volume of St. George Mivart. Fermor's preconceived idea of a woman who read thoughtful books, was a dowdy person who insisted on forcing her convictions on other people. This woman, however, was an extremely gentle and winning and dove-eyed creature in a delicious gown the colour of the daffodil. A man could stand a good deal of thoughtful reading from a woman who looked and dressed as did Theodora.

"Pretty heavy reading?" he asked, smiling.

"Very interesting," replied Theodora, smiling back, "but not so fatiguing as a batch of second-rate novels—I wish you would read it."

"My dear Theodora, I have no taste for speculative philosophy. I am afraid that practical politics is my rôle."

"It is a very great and powerful rôle," replied Theodora, still cutting the leaves of her book. "I find that men in general are divided into two classes —those who say things and those who do things. Mivart could say things. I prefer a man like you, who can do things. Have you heard from Lord Castlemaine to-day?"

"No," replied Fermor, "not a line since his letter of a week ago, saying that he would arrive in England the first week in March. You must not be afraid of him; he is as helpless as other men with a charming woman."

Theodora opened her dark eyes in calm amazement.

"I am not in the least afraid of Lord Castlemaine. I rather like him. Why should anyone be afraid of another person? I believe your aunt, Lady Susan, expected me to be terrified when she refused to come to our wedding. She is an excellent, well-meaning woman, but perfectly ridiculous."

Fermor laid down his paper and laughed with quiet enjoyment. His American wife was always giving him new views of things and innocently leading up to them. He was beginning to see in her nascent gleams of that humour with which God has endowed every American. Then Theodora began to speak of a large party which they were arranging for Easter

week, which fell on the last of March. It was to be a political party, and Theodora was to try her hand for the first time at being a political hostess. Fermor, however, had no fear of the outcome, after three weeks of Theodora's *régime*.

"Papa doesn't want to be here then," said Theodora, "but of course I shan't allow him to beg off. It might look disrespectful to the world if my father should be left out of the first large party we are entertaining, so I have written him very positively that he must come."

This writing "very positively" to a father that he must do thus and so, was still novel to Fermor, and he laughed again, to Theodora's surprise, who had no suspicion of anything humorous in her statement.

"It will all be very fine," said Fermor. "I like the idea of once more receiving public men as my grandfather did when he was Secretary of State for War. But after all, I shall be glad when we can resume our quiet evenings alone together."

A deep blush appeared in Theodora's pale, pretty cheeks.

Fermor, like a lover, took her hand and asked her if she, too, would not be glad when they could once more be alone together. Theodora said no word, but she raised her dark eyes to Fermor's with a confession in them which he readily understood.

At that moment, each felt almost too happy. The old superstition that when one reaches the ultimate

heights of love and joy, Fate must be propitiated, occurred to Fermor. He had from the beginning found himself more and more inclined to this marriage which seemed to be one of interest; when it was accomplished, it dawned upon him that he had reached a singular degree both of good fortune and happiness. He had achieved his ambition, a seat in Parliament, and had acquired King's Lyndon, to which his heart had ever been bound. He was married to a wife who commanded his admiration and his interest, and now—the greatest good of all had befallen him—he knew they loved each other.

"Let us walk on the terrace," said Fermor; "it is not cold."

"And the moon shines," answered Theodora softly.

For an hour they strolled up and down slowly, watching the moon shimmering on the lake, and listening to those faint sounds of night that make the silence more silent. They spoke little; they were oppressed with the sense of their happiness.

"We are not very young, remember," said Theodora, as if chiding herself for their hour of rapture.

"No, thank God," replied Fermor, "we know something. We cannot be deceived any more."

That evening walk on the terrace marked an epoch. It was the full revelation of their souls to each other.

Lord Castlemaine was one of the few philosophers who could live philosophically. The news of Fer-

mor's marriage on the heels of the newspaper story, and what it suggested, gave him a shock, but he rallied from it quickly. After all, Theodora herself was unexceptionable. The money was undoubtedly secure, and the one thing was to repudiate Seymour and hush the matter up as far as possible. The point that troubled Lord Castlemaine most, the thought of his future grandchildren inheriting a strain of convict blood, was still in the air. There might not be children or they might not resemble Seymour. The control of the will is the great factor in human affairs, and Lord Castlemaine set about making the most of the advantages and the least of the disadvantages of his son's marriage. He knew about the large party, including the Prime Minister, who was to spend Easter week at King's Lyndon, but gave himself no uneasiness with regard to Theodora's bearing. Being an excellent judge of women, Lord Castlemaine felt that his daughter-in-law was superior to most women in this respect. One thing, however, was certain—Seymour must be made to keep away from King's Lyndon.

These ideas occupied Lord Castlemaine during his convalescence, which was rapid. In the third week in March he was quite well enough to travel, his gout subdued, and he felt himself ten years younger for his winter at Monte Carlo. The identity of the person who had sent him the newspaper was quite unknown to Lord Castlemaine, until he was in the act of putting it in his despatch box, and

then his eye caught a memorandum scrawled on the inner page, in a handwriting distinctly un-English. It was "Send this to "A. N. W." Lord Castlemaine's mind instantly flew to Wyndham, the American journalist, and he recalled Wyndham's card, "Mr. Arthur Nesbit Wyndham." Lord Castlemaine was so convinced that he had found his man, that the day he started for England he sent a telegram to Wyndham, asking him to call on an evening three days hence, at Castlemaine House.

He made the journey by way of Paris, and arrived in fine fettle at Castlemaine House. Lady Susan Battle, who loved as well as feared her brother, invaded the house on the evening of Lord Castlemaine's arrival, as soon as dinner was over, and he was smoking his forbidden cigar and enjoying his unauthorised coffee before the library fire. Lady Susan began to pour out her own troubles, chief of which was the incipient affair between Jane Battle and Wyndham, and Jane's silent but open rebellion.

"What are you worrying for?" asked Lord Castlemaine; "the fellow is decent enough and has some money, and the girl likes him."

"Jane is my step-daughter and I am the daughter of the seventh Earl of Castlemaine," replied Lady Susan as if conveying that information for the first time, "and no girl in her set has married an American, so why should my husband's daughter so degrade herself?"

"I can tell you why no girl in Jane's set has mar-

ried an American," answered Lord Castlemaine with his most provoking good humour—"none of them has been asked. American men don't want to marry our girls, that is plain enough. It is just as easy to get a few millions into a family by means of a complaisant American husband, as through a spoiled and overbearing American girl—for that is what they all are. For my part, I believe that my daughter-in-law has dragooned Fermor from the beginning—not openly and violently, of course, but 'in pretty Fanny's way!'"

"True," replied Lady Susan tartly. "In everything concerning the engagement and marriage, Fermor yielded with the most abominable weakness. I understand she herself pays the men servants' wages. As for the marriage ceremony being performed by a Romish priest, I was simply shocked. Fermor should never have consented to that. I should not be surprised if Lady Fermor should actually drag Fermor off to the Roman Catholic church on Sundays, instead of worshipping, as he should, in the family pew in his own parish church."

"I wish to God she would," replied Lord Castlemaine, as usual in opposition. "It would pay off some old scores I owe the Bishop. I objected very much to the vicar at King's Lyndon, and his meddling with the tenants, and listening to their grievances, and I asked the Bishop to give him a wigging. Instead of that, the Bishop had him for a week-end at the Palace, and I believe, between them, they

concocted a scheme against me and in favour of the tenants."

Lady Susan was used to this sort of thing and did not take it wholly at its face value. Nevertheless, it was very annoying. In the midst of their talk, a card was brought to Lord Castlemaine and he directed that the gentleman be shown in. The gentleman proved to be Wyndham, which sent a thrill of indignation down Lady Susan's backbone.

Wyndham, however, met Lady Susan with affectionate effusion. In vain, Lady Susan assumed what Lord Castlemaine called her Queen Boadicea air, and drew about her large and stately figure the folds of her crimson velvet gown, which had done duty for ten seasons, and showed it. Wyndham only moved his chair the closer and inquired pointedly after Miss Battle.

"My daughter is quite well," responded Lady Susan freezingly.

"It is hardly worth while to ask how you are, Lady Susan," said Wyndham with an admiring grin. "You are, I may say, a perfect picture of health and beauty, and what I should call, a Hebe in middle life."

Lady Susan turned a stony glance on Wyndham, and Lord Castlemaine, with an answering grin, replied thus, for her:

"I am sure," he said, "Lady Susan appreciates these compliments, and your admiration for Jane is well founded. She is really an attractive girl, when she can escape from that self-consciousness which is

the drawback of English girls. It is the fault of the mothers though—not of the unfortunate daughters themselves. Susan, you should educate yourself to look with feigned indifference upon a man who approaches your step-daughter, even if he be marriageable."

"I think," said Lady Susan, rising majestically, "I must say good evening. Mr. Battle is at home this evening, and I don't wish to leave him alone."

Wyndham opened the library door for her and shook hands with her warmly, asking to be remembered to the young ladies, and especially to Miss Battle.

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Reckoning Day

When the door was shut and Wyndham returned to Lord Castlemaine, he took up a cigar while waiting Lord Castlemaine's communication. The room was large, lofty, dark and magnificent. The sparkling fire and the glowing lamp cast high lights upon Lord Castlemaine's strong, high-coloured face and large figure. He was the battered wreck of manly beauty, just as his mind was a type of useless and perverted talent. Wyndham, with his keen and practical American mind, grasped this and thought Lord Castlemaine one of the most interesting men he had ever met. As for Lord Castlemaine's relations with the rest of mankind, this man of great birth, gifts and fortune had lived in vain. For himself, however, he had done generous things. Wyndham thought he had never known a man who saw men and who looked at life in a clearer light than this pagan person. But, on the whole, Lord Castlemaine reckoned that but one fate remained for all who opposed him, and that was destruction.

After a minute, Lord Castlemaine asked:

"Do you intend to marry the Battle girl?"

Wyndham's face flushed a little; he was not ac-

customed to hear such things, put in such a form. Like the normal American, he was as sentimental as he was practical.

"I hardly think that is the way to put it," he said. "Would Miss Battle do me the honour of marrying *me?*"

"Oh, Lord! Lady Susan tells me the girl is dying in love with you."

The flush deepened on Wyndham's clear-cut, clean-shaven face.

"I don't consider any one can be justified in saying that. It is a good deal, however, to ask a girl in Miss Battle's position to give up her family and her country and to come to America with me. I have a very good fortune, but there is something else in this world besides money."

Lord Castlemaine was surprised to hear this sentiment from an American.

"The girl won't mind that," he replied, puffing away at his cigar. "If there is one thing that an Englishman or an Englishwoman minds less than another it is leaving England. That is why we are the greatest colonisers on earth. By the way—I believe you were present at Lord Fermor's wedding."

"Yes," answered Wyndham; "it was one of the few cheerful weddings I ever saw. Generally the small wedding at home is about as gay as sitting up with a corpse."

"It began as an arrangement," said Lord Castlemaine, "but I think I saw indications that some-

thing stronger, if not wiser, was developing between Lord Fermor and Madame Fontarini."

"I think I saw the same thing. Madame Fontarini has had a terrible experience in life. I fancy she was afraid of men and would never have made a second marriage but for her father."

"Ah, yes."

"Then when Fermor appeared, I am inclined to believe her inclination seconded her father's wishes."

"American fathers, I understand, are not very keen for their daughters to marry," said Lord Castlemaine, looking full into Wyndham's eyes; "but perhaps there was a reason in Seymour's case."

Lord Castlemaine opened the drawer of the library table, unlocked his portfolio and handed Wyndham the newspaper which he had left in Mrs. Bellenden's house. One look at Wyndham's expressive face convinced Lord Castlemaine that he and Wyndham harboured the same suspicions concerning Seymour.

"It is a very terrible and very painful affair," said Lord Castlemaine, quietly assuming that he and Wyndham thought alike. "The only thing is to try if possible to keep it quiet and break up all associations between Lady Fermor and her father."

"It might be easy enough to keep it quiet," replied Wyndham after a pause; "it all began twenty-three years ago, and nobody is particularly interested in bringing a man back to serve his term after that length of time. However, if the authorities wanted him, they could very easily have him ex-

tradited; but as for breaking up all association between Lady Fermor and her father—that I consider quite impossible."

A look came into Lord Castlemaine's eyes which Wyndham thought no woman would like to face. But Wyndham himself was troubled; he rose and stood before Lord Castlemaine's chair.

"I can't tell you," he said, "how much this thing has distressed me. I grew up in this little town and the story was familiar to me as a boy, and I conceived the idea of solving the mystery. Then two years ago, when reports drifted back to us that this man still lived and had made a great fortune, I took a sort of academic interest in it and made up my mind to trace the story."

"You have traced it only too well," said Lord Castlemaine with a short laugh.

"So I fear. Mr. Seymour himself is as far removed from the type I imagined as any man could be. I admire his generosity, his Christian socialism, his simplicity, his devotion to his daughter. I have accepted his hospitality and now, all at once, I am confronted with evidences which are very painful. At least I have nothing to do with that newspaper story, and it embodies a great deal more than I ever knew."

"I wonder what considerate friend sent it to me," said Lord Castlemaine, putting the newspaper back in the portifolio and locking it and the drawer, too.

Wyndham thought a moment or two.

"I remember mislaying an American newspaper

some weeks ago, leaving it in Mrs. Bellenden's house, in Chester Street. This looks like the newspaper, although I had not opened it."

"And it was no doubt sent me by Mrs. Bellenden —confound her!" answered Lord Castlemaine.

Wyndham sat down again on the other side of the table, looking very unhappy, and leaned his head upon his hands.

"Some women are devils," he said. "It was Mrs. Bellenden who put the first idea in my mind that Seymour was the man I was trying to place."

"After all," continued Lord Castlemaine, taking up his habitual mode of reasoning, "the whole thing is done, and we must make the best of it. Do you know where Seymour is just now?"

"He went to Scotland for a month after the wedding, and is due in London about this time. I can only say this, that in any effort to keep this quiet, you may count upon me, out of sincere regard for Mr. Seymour and Lady Fermor."

Presently Wyndham got up and went away. Lord Castlemaine walked across the great room, pulled aside the heavy draperies of the window, and looked out upon the wide street and the darkness punctured at points by the gas lamps. He glanced toward the next house and, to his surprise, saw lights in the drawing-room windows. A touch of the bell brought a footman.

"Go to the next house," said Lord Castlemaine, "and inquire if Mr. Seymour is at home, and if so,

make Lord Castlemaine's compliments and he would be very much obliged if Mr. Seymour could see Lord Castlemaine here for a few minutes this evening."

The footman went out and Lord Castlemaine returned to his seat by the fire. It would be extremely fortunate if Seymour were at home. In five minutes the footman returned, saying Mr. Seymour was at home and would have the pleasure of coming to see Lord Castlemaine.

In five minutes more, Seymour entered the room. He greeted Lord Castlemaine with his usual simple cordiality and took the chair lately vacated by Wyndham. Lord Castlemaine was more than courteous. Something of *noblesse oblige* remained in him—he was about to deal this man a mortal blow, barbed with certainty. Meanwhile, he would treat Seymour strictly as a gentleman.

"You had a pretty bad accident, I understand," said Seymour, leaning forward, the light from the lamp falling upon the grey hair and moustache and his eyes with their singular expression of pathos and trust.

"Not so very bad," replied Lord Castlemaine, "but it kept me quiet for a whole month and cured my gout."

"You know, of course, that Lord Fermor did not receive the telegram about the accident and supposed you were in Paris until the day before the wedding came off. I wish you could have been present."

"It was my intention to be there, but I did not permanently recover consciousness until some hours after the ceremony had been performed," replied Lord Castlemaine.

"It was really a most interesting occasion," said Seymour, with a sort of simple enthusiasm. "You will pardon a father's pride when I tell you that my daughter never appeared to greater advantage than on that day, and I never felt more deeply assured of her affection than when I parted from her that afternoon. You know, perhaps, that I have leased a small place—Barleywood—close to King's Lyndon, and my daughter and Lord Fermor have been preparing it for me. My daughter writes me that Lord Fermor has been most sympathetic and has shown the greatest interest in arranging for my comfort. It is very gratifying."

"Barleywood is an insignificant place, but comfortable enough," said Lord Castlemaine quietly.

"So," replied Seymour, "now that my daughter is once more happy, I should lead a life of quietness and even obscurity. It was natural that I should wish to give my daughter all the advantages of fortune, and I may say, I did it. But now I am growing an old man, I am very simple in my tastes, and to live quietly and see my daughter once a day, is enough for me in this life."

"I believe," said Lord Castlemaine slowly, "that you are capable of any sacrifices for your daughter."

"I hope so," answered Seymour.

"Then," said Lord Castlemaine, "it might be well for you to have no further association with Lady Fermor."

Seymour shrank back in his chair and the placid expression of his eyes changed instantly to one of anxiety and terror. Lord Castlemaine once more unlocked the drawer and the portfolio and took from it the newspaper and laid it before Seymour, who raised it up with trembling hands and began to read the marked column. When he laid it down on the table again, he had recovered his composure.

"It's every word true," he said calmly. "I have been looking for this for twenty years past."

Lord Castlemaine had expected some outbreak of emotion, a shuddering and sobbing, a vain pleading and protesting when the shock of revelation came. Nothing of the sort occurred. The old man—for Seymour always appeared to be an old and shattered man—sat quiet as death.

"Then," said Lord Castlemaine, "you see the propriety of what I said just now with regard to Lady Fermor."

"Yes," replied Seymour in a low voice, "I see it as well as you do."

Seymour's look and words touched even Lord Castlemaine's hard heart, and he said with some trace of feeling:

"Of course we must keep everything as far as possible from Lady Fermor."

"I am afraid that will be impossible," replied Sey-

mour quietly. "I think you hardly understand the devoted intimacy in which my daughter and I have lived since she was ten years old. She is much cleverer than I, and I could never conceal anything from her except this," he said, laying his finger on the newspaper. "She had great faith in me, and when I have sometimes told her that I had something in my life to expiate, she always said it was a trifle —something no other man would bother about."

"It is very difficult for a man to deceive a woman, though men deceive themselves readily enough," replied Lord Castlemaine; "but Lady Fermor must, of course, see the necessity of holding no further intercourse with you."

Seymour remained silent for a few minutes.

"I am afraid," he repeated presently, "yon don't fully understand my daughter. I don't think she will agree to give me up."

"She must!" shouted Lord Castlemaine, bringing his fist down suddenly on the table.

Until then their voices had not risen above the ordinary pitch.

"In any event," continued Lord Castlemaine savagely, "you can take yourself off and keep out of the way."

"I will do my best," replied Seymour humbly, "but I tell you in advance, my daughter has great tenacity of purpose and the command of a great deal of money. I think she would make every effort to find me."

Lord Castlemaine ground his teeth and at that moment would have endorsed everything Lady Susan Battle had ever said against Americans. The idea that this woman, only the other day married into a great family, should go contrary to the traditions of an historic house and set up her will in opposition, was infuriating to him. Still, his rage did not rob him of his wits, and in a little while he resumed:

"Since you are willing to go away we can now arrange it."

"Yes," replied Seymour, "but I should like once more to see my daughter."

"That is out of the question if you are acting in good faith and really mean to go away. You would be certain to betray something—Lady Fermor would be alarmed and then the game would be up."

Seymour said nothing, but shrank back again into his chair, took out his handkerchief and Lord Castlemaine saw that he was weeping silently.

"Now," said Lord Castlemaine, "I have met with great varieties of men in my life, but no one quite of your character and history. Tell me what really happened, apart from the lurid writing in this newspaper story."

"I don't know how it happened any more than you do," replied Seymour tremulously. "I owed this man some money—a small amount, but a great deal to me at the time. I went to see him in his office in this little town in the East, and we had some

words. He was a man of violent temper, though not bad-hearted, and struck at me, and I struck him back. It was not much of a blow—I never had a strong physique, but he fell over dead on the floor. Some crazy devil entered my mind and I thought I would run away; but I had no money. I felt in his pockets and took out his wallet and ran to the little railway station. When I opened the wallet to pay for my ticket to New York, I found a great roll of bills. A debtor had just come in and paid him in cash something like a thousand dollars. I got on the train and reached New York that night; I went to a lodging-house and tumbled into bed and slept all night as if I had been drugged. Next morning I woke up, sane as ever in my life. I took the first train back to the place—surrendered myself and gave up the money less the little it cost me to go and return from New York. The man had been found dead in his office, but there was a question as to whether the blow had killed him or whether he had died from an embolism from which he had long suffered. The loss of the money, though, was known immediately. I was tried at the next term of the court, pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. I was made the warden's 'trusty.' Do you know what that is?"

"Something like a ticket-of-leave-man," said Lord Castlemaine.

"Yes. I was employed in the warden's office and

allowed outside the prison limits and to wear plain clothes. I had some friends who were very active in trying to get me a pardon from the Governor. One day, just three months before my time was up, I drove into town in the warden's trap and went to the postoffice. In the mail was a letter for me saying that Theodora, then a little girl not ten years old, was ill and the woman who attended her had deserted her. I had some money of my own on deposit in the warden's hands. I sent the warden's mail and the trap back by a boy and took a train to the place where the child lay ill, three hundred miles away. I did it deliberately and I would do the same thing again. The day after I left, a pardon arrived from the Governor, but it could not apply, of course. A breach of faith on the part of a 'trusty' is very severely punished. I carried the child when she recovered as far West as my money would take me. I found a cheap school for her, and went myself to the mining regions.

"People in Europe have thought me a great financier. I never was anything of the kind. I grew rich by a miracle. It is always the greenhorns who make the rich finds. I staked off the claim that turned out to be the richest ore-bearing section that was ever known in America. All the other miners stopped digging when they got down a hundred and fifty feet. As I knew nothing about mining, I kept on, and a week after the whole camp was deserted I struck a great belt of ore. It formed a curious suc-

cession of loops, all in my own claim. The whole region was rich. There was a concentration of wealth in my claim that was unprecedented. The more gold was dug out, the more there seemed to be in sight. I made a clear profit of three million dollars and I invested in safe interest-bearing securities and let the income accumulate. I brought Theodora to Europe when she was ten years old, because I dared not stay in America. One of the worst phases of my punishment has been this living out of my own country. I have no friends here—I can't make any. I am an American and I don't understand Europeans, few of us ever do. I dared not make friends with the few Americans I met, and my life was given over to my daughter. I am not a man of the world, as you know, and when Pietro Fontarini pretended to fall in love with my daughter when she was eighteen, and I thought she was in love with him, I was eager for the marriage, for I thought that this blow might come at any moment and I wanted her to have a protector. Fontarini, however, was no protector for any woman—God eternally damn him!" There was no lack of excitement now in Seymour's voice or face. He almost shouted the words.

The remembrance of Theodora's injuries seemed to sting the old man into quivering anger, as he used the words that sounded strange from his lips.

"Yes, Fontarini was a damned scoundrel," said Lord Castlemaine.

"My daughter never told me half her sufferings.

When Fontarini was gone, I knew that my daughter, with her grace and charm and the fortune I could give her, would have many opportunities to marry, and Lord Fermor seemed to me the right person. I became convinced that it was far more a love match than either one of them realised. Now, if my daughter can be kept from shame, that is all I ask. I understand perfectly well your stake in the matter and would be glad of your advice."

This was considerably more reasonable than Lord Castlemaine had expected. He had looked for pleadings and obstinate resistance from Seymour and had found, on the contrary, what had seemed to him a perfectly rational submission.

"I have talked with Wyndham, the American journalist, who is a friend of yours and of Lady Fermor's, I believe."

"Yes, Wyndham was one of the few Americans I ever dared to cultivate."

"And he had heard the story and was making quiet inquiries in Europe to find this lost 'trusty.' It was not he, however, but another man who wrote this story. Now, stay here quietly in London until you hear from me. I shall go down to King's Lyndon to-morrow. I may not succeed in bringing Lady Fermor around to my views immediately, but in two or three days something must be settled."

"I will do as you suggest," replied Seymour, rising.

Lord Castlemaine, from one of those sudden im-

pulses which remained from the wreck of virtue, held out his hand to Seymour, who, however, bowed with quiet dignity.

"I thank you," he said, "but I never offered my hand to any man as long as I was a 'trusty.' I certainly should not do so now, when you know what I was and what I am."

Seymour walked across and out of the great room, and Lord Castlemaine heard the heavy street door shut after him.

In Lord Castlemaine's opinion Seymour was a poor creature, the sport of destiny, an involuntary convict, an accidental rich man, the victim of his affections—never were two men more opposed than Seymour and Lord Castlemaine. Yet Seymour was not without dignity, Lord Castlemaine was made to feel.

If only Lady Fermor could prove as reasonable! Lord Castlemaine did not doubt, however, his power to coerce Lady Fermor in the end.

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Heart of a Woman

It was early March; one of those soft, bright days which seem the heralds of the springtime. The rich, brown earth was redolent, the gardens and lawns of King's Lyndon had a faint green haze upon them which would soon be foliage. Afar off, the breezy uplands and champaigns of the park glowed in the warm, rich light. There would be storms and wintry days yet, before the summer, but to-day was an enchantment, a dream of May. Theodora and Fermor had been married six weeks that day. Fermor was teaching Theodora to ride, and she proved an apt pupil. Already, in a few lessons, she had got her seat and was quite fearless. They had ridden over to Barleywood, which was in perfect order for Seymour, who was expected to arrive at any moment from London. When Lord and Lady Fermor returned, they did not go within, but, still wearing their riding dresses, walked around the lake. Then Fermor declared he must go to his study and work. He was by nature a serious man, and had taken a serious view of life while still in the Guards, perhaps the most purely ornamental military organisation ever known on this planet. Theodora,

unlike Fermor, was by nature a child of laughter. Disappointment, grief and shame had robbed her early of her gaiety, but in the sunny air of happiness it returned. Fermor was amazed and delighted at Theodora's radiant spirits, the airy humour she developed, her ready, rippling laughter. Theodora herself was not surprised. She was like a frozen fountain upon which the summer sun had shone warmly; it began once more its song and its dancing.

When Fermor had gone to his study, Theodora changed her riding dress for one of a delicate and spring-like green, and put on her head a hat crowned with roses. She went to the little yellow room, which seemed to her the very abode of joy. What happy hours had she known in that little room since her marriage! Hours so serene, so full of calm happiness, of deep, interior peace—and the long vista of the future was full of such halcyon hours. Outside her window, a family of robins rioted in the ivy. She took up her violin and began to imitate their bird notes. A little way off, where the lake laughed in the jocund sunlight, half a dozen gardeners were working, whistling as they trundled their barrows along. On the warm terrace, a flock of blue pigeons chattered softly.

Suddenly, a tall figure crossed the terrace and unceremoniously opened the door of the little yellow room where Theodora stood. It was Lord Castlemaine.

As he meant to bend Theodora to his will, he began by placating her. He kissed her on the cheek, complimenting her on her appearance and declared Fermor to be a lucky dog. Theodora received this with smiling pleasure. She was always flattered by Lord Castlemaine's notice, and wished to please his exacting taste.

"I will send word to Lord Fermor that you are here," she said.

"No, pray don't. I wish to see you particularly," replied Lord Castlemaine. "There is a grave matter to be settled and I wish to talk with you alone."

Theodora surmised in a moment that this grave matter was also a painful matter. Her radiant face grew serious, as she replied quietly:

"I am a great believer in settling unpleasant things promptly. I suppose it is a part of my American blood."

As she spoke she sat down close by the window, the strong morning light falling upon her black hair which accentuated the milky whiteness of her skin. Lord Castlemaine had never been in doubt concerning the marked distinction which was Theodora's real claim to beauty, and it had never been more obvious to him than at that moment. So long as Theodora had been unhappy, her eyes had a downward glance and she was indifferent to the attention of those around her, but now that she had become acquainted with true happiness and the joy of living, she held

her head up with the proud poise which is characteristic of American women.

Lord Castlemaine had meant to tell Theodora in a few words the newspaper story, but he concluded, as she would undoubtedly demand his sources of information, the best plan was to give the newspaper clipping to her in the first instance. He took it from his pocketbook and handed it to her.

"Read this," he said; "it concerns your father."

Theodora took the clipping and said, smiling:

"I know what it is. Every now and then, some of my father's good deeds get into print and it annoys him dreadfully. He is so modest, he doesn't even let me know half the good acts he does."

She began reading, Lord Castlemaine watching her closely. He had expected Theodora to grow pale as soon as she realised that the person referred to was Seymour; instead of that, the red blood poured into her delicate cheeks until her face was scarlet. She read the long article through carefully to the end without showing the slightest tremor although deeply flushed with indignation, and then, rising and crossing the room, she struck a match and before Lord Castlemaine could check her, dropped the clipping on the hearth and saw it shrivel up in the small and sudden flame. Then turning to Lord Castlemaine and looking him in the face with a courage which he had never seen in any woman's eyes, she said to him:

"What did you mean by showing me that story?"

Lord Castlemaine was so astounded by her tone and action, that it took him at least five seconds—a long time for him—to collect his wits. Then he rose to his feet and replied coolly:

"Because it is true. Your father admits it."

Theodora remained silent and a little smile of contempt appeared upon her red lips.

"I require my father's confirmation," she said, "before I will believe one word of that."

This was, in effect, calling Lord Castlemaine a traducer. He had thought it out of the power of anything as insignificant as a woman to make him angry, but this made him very angry.

"My dear Lady Fermor," he said in the bland voice which always meant mischief with him, "what you believe or not, is not the chief point; it is what is to be done. I had an interview with your father last night and we discussed the matter thoroughly. He behaved, I must say, most commendably and agreed that it would be best there be no further intercourse between him and you and Fermor. You can readily see that whatever your feelings might have been before your marriage, they must now conform to Fermor's wishes, duties and position."

"I understand perfectly," replied Theodora in a soft, composed voice. "When I married Lord Fermor, I incurred obligations to his position. He also incurred some obligations toward me; one of them is that when my father—the best of men—is attacked and misrepresented, it is Lord Fermor's

duty to stand by him. I feel sure he will do it."

"That might be the case," replied Lord Castlemaine, still dangerously calm, "if there were any question concerning this charge against your father, but he gave me every detail of the story last night. He was sentenced to serve a term of two years in state's prison for involuntary manslaughter and larceny. He took advantage of a chance to get away from prison three months before the expiration of his term. You seem to be unconscious of the fact that if these circumstances had been known before your marriage to Lord Fermor, the marriage could not have taken place."

At last Lord Castlemaine had driven the brave blood from Theodora's face. She stood pale with anger and mortification, her eyes blazing and fixed upon Lord Castlemaine. The conviction that what he said was not without truth and even justice, added a sharper pang. But it aroused all the resentment in Theodora's nature, and she was a woman capable of the deepest resentment.

Lord Castlemaine mistook her silence for the admission that she saw the necessity of yielding.

"I think," he said, "you see how matters are, and it is absolutely out of the question that there can be any open association between you and your father. Of course everything will be done to hush the matter up and I presume it can be managed. But Seymour must remain in the strictest seclusion.

I understand that he was to be included in the house party to meet the Prime Minister Easter week—that is quite impossible now."

"The question of who should be guests at King's Lyndon during Easter week, is a point to be settled by Lord Fermor and myself," replied Theodora in a composed voice. "I am sorry that your first visit here should have brought with it such painful circumstances, but I must bid you good morning."

Theodora did not ask to be excused or make any motion to leave the room, and Lord Castlemaine felt himself ordered out of the house. He had never in all his experience known an instance of a wife taking such a position, and that, too, without consulting her husband. If his words had made Theodora's delicate face burning red, hers made his purple with anger. He made her a bow without speaking, and walked out of the room. Theodora mechanically watched him walk the length of the terrace and enter the door at the farther end, which led to Fermor's study.

She remained in the same position for she knew not how long. By the strange intuitive perceptions of women, she began to realise, in spite of her protest, that the story was true. Her quick and retentive memory glanced backward and she remembered that her father often spoke of expiation and made veiled allusions to something in his past life which needed atonement. Seymour had a constant and pathetic longing for America, and she herself had

a strong desire to go back there after the death of Pietro Fontarini. Her father had, with much agitation, but without giving any specific reason, assured her of the impossibility of their ever returning. But that her father had not really committed a crime, that it had all been the frantic impulse of a moment, even the newspaper story proclaimed. Theodora had too much of sound sense to ignore Fermor's claim in the matter, and there was another persistent petitioner in Fermor's behalf—her own heart. She was in love with Fermor, she had known it before she married him and she knew it still better now. But the new love could not cast out the old. Her father had nothing in life but herself—his money profited him nothing but the pleasure of giving it way, especially to her; his generosity had been royal. The remembrance of his sublime affection, the long habit of passionate devotion to him, was upon her. It involved her in a fierce conflict during which one thing remained clear—that it would be impossible for her to abandon that tender, appealing father. She had often felt a sense of shock in England at the strange antagonism which is sometimes seen existing between parents and children. It was frightful and not understandable to her. Probably the people in this strange land of her adoption could not comprehend the closeness of the tie as it was commonly understood in America. With these thoughts surging through heart and brain, Theodora knew not that a half-hour had passed. Then Fermor

entered the room and came up to her. Agitation and emotion overwhelmed Theodora. Fermor represented, to her, protection and tenderness. She threw herself, pale, trembling and sobbing, into his arms.

Fermor led her to a sofa and soothed her until she was able to speak.

Her tear-drowned face lay against his shoulder, and although her wild sobs had ceased, a shuddering sigh trembled throughout her whole body.

"My father has told me about it," he said. "I am afraid he was a little abrupt with you."

"I resented it, of course," answered Theodora; "and I resented the manner in which Lord Castlemaine did it. If it had come to me from you it would have been far different."

"Perhaps it would have been better," replied Fermor.

"Is Lord Castlemaine here now?" asked Theodora, raising herself and growing a little calmer.

"No," replied Fermor with some embarrassment, "he told me that you had practically ordered him out of the house."

"I could not allow anyone to speak to me in my own house as Lord Castlemaine did," said Theodora.

Fermor's face changed a little as she said "my own house," and Theodora hastily added, "That is the way an American woman speaks of her house. It does not matter whether it is hers or her husband's."

Theodora felt that she had made a painful mistake —that this was one of these subtle points upon which the American and English mind can never agree, and she unconsciously raised another point at once by saying, "Lord Castlemaine assumed that we must withdraw the invitation to my father for Easter week."

"You will understand," said Fermor gently but with a certain coldness, "that the obligations of a family and a house, I may say, must be considered."

"I do understand it," replied Theodora, softly withdrawing from Fermor's arm, and looking with lonely and miserable eyes at him, "but are not the obligations of a child toward the best and kindest of fathers to be considered too? It would have been a delicate thing for you to have said so much to me, but in Lord Castlemaine it was most unjustifiable."

Theodora withdrew herself still farther from her husband's arm, and the husband and wife looked coldly in each other's eyes. There was a rift between them which might mean a chasm so narrow as to be almost imperceptible, but was so deep that it reached the very foundation of things. Here was a vital point and each had rights which conflicted with the other.

"With regard to my father coming to King's Lyndon," said Theodora after a pause, "that will settle itself, he will not come. But I can't admit Lord Castlemaine's right to interfere in any way with my association with my father. If my affection

did not make me keep up my association with my father, my duty would. I should no more think of abandoning him than of abandoning you. I am not a slave, but a wife."

It occurred to Fermor that this was the American and feminine equivalent to what every Englishman is supposed to maintain at all costs, "I am master in my own house." This last was always taken to mean master of everybody in the house, but Lady Fermor not only disowned this proposition, but set up a counter claim. They drew apart and sat, each in a corner of the sofa, facing the first crisis of their marriage. The crisis was so terrible, involving so much of honour and affection, a crisis so perilous to their new-found happiness, that it became at once the greatest affair of their lives.

"I think," said Fermor, after a pause, "that we should particularly avoid any hasty action in this matter. It is not easy to decide these things within an hour of their happening."

"I quite agree with you," answered Theodora after another pause, "but meanwhile I must see my father. I shall go up to London by the two o'clock train."

Fermor made no reply to this. Up to that time Theodora's calm way of doing things, the manner in which subjects which were usually yielded to a man were found to have been already settled, and judiciously settled, had amused and even pleased him. Now, however, when the principle applied to

grave and serious matters it had its inconveniences. He had never known exactly how to controvert Theodora. He knew less than ever now, because it was not in the nature of an honourable man to use against a woman the weapons of force he held in his hand, and that woman had aroused in him unexpected, deep, everlasting and passionate attachment for which he was willing to sacrifice much. Theodora's religious preferences, he felt sure, had impaired his political prospects. Her obstinacy concerning her father might cost him his political future. It might even cost him the sweet domestic peace which had suddenly dawned upon him in the society of this gentle and charming creature. The prospect was not an agreeable one. If he said to Theodora, "I would prefer you should not see your father at present," he was confident that Theodora's reply would be, "But I must see my father at present," and if Fermor had answered, "I forbid it," there was no way for him to enforce it, and it would precipitate a collision between them when they would least be fitted to meet it. Fermor glanced toward Theodora. She was leaning back and the large bright tears were dropping upon her cheeks, now once more pale. He leaned over and took her hand.

"Theodora," he said with grave sweetness, "let us not rashly throw away our happiness. Let us not ask impossible things of the other. I tell you frankly that the first motive of our marriage on my part was one of interest, but I swear to you now, that for

some time before our marriage I would have wished to marry you if you had not five pounds to your fortune. I think you can't complain that I have not conceded all that you have claimed. But in this you must consider someone else besides your father. You must consider that we owe something to the children which may come to us."

"And if we have children, they will owe something to us," replied Theodora with the passionate stubbornness of a faithful woman. "If we should expend upon them years of care, oceans of money, if we should make countless sacrifices for them, as my father made for me—then if they should happen to disapprove of us, are we to be thrown aside, trampled upon, insulted and then forgotten?"

"But it is not possible that any such contingency as this will arise in our case."

"Certainly not, but other contingencies may arise and we can't judge now of the view that beings not now in existence will take of any subject whatever. You may call me superstitious if you like, but I believe, I feel in my heart, that if I desert the best of fathers now, and if I ever have a child, I shall reap retributive justice which will overtake me through that child."

She spoke warmly, the eloquent blood mounting to her cheeks. Fermor said no more. He saw that it was useless to argue against her tender sophistry, her unswerving loyalty, her unreasoning devotion, but like most men, he loved her the better for it. A

woman without tender sophistries and superstitions, would hardly be a woman.

After a long pause, Theodora spoke again in a voice of concentrated sadness.

"It is written," she said, "that love with me shall always mean a tragedy. I thought when I married Pietro Fontarini that I loved him, and see how that ended! I know I loved my child—what a fate was his! I love my father, and it seems to have brought ruin upon him, and now you." She rose and Fermor rose, too.

"I can make an answering confession to yours," she continued. "There never was any question of interest or rank with me. I think love came to me before it did to you. When a woman loves, there is but one limit to the sacrifices she will make, and that is to sacrifice someone else she loves. I can't sacrifice my father; if I am too constant and too faithful to him—well, it is my nature to be constant and faithful."

Fermor drew her to him and kissed her on the lips.

"Whatever happens, Theodora," he said, "we at least know that we love each other."

"Yes," replied Theodora, and returned his kiss.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Counsels of Friends

Only a few persons in this world have self-command enough to prevent family cataclysm from being known to the domestic staff. But not one of the army of servants at King's Lyndon suspected that there was a grave disagreement between Lord and Lady Fermor. Luncheon was at one o'clock, so that Theodora could easily make the train for London. Lord Fermor went with her to the station and put her in the compartment. Theodora told him that she would wire him at what hour to meet her next day, as she would remain over night at her father's house. She had made an excuse for not taking her maid, wishing to be entirely alone.

There were other passengers in the railway carriage, so that Lord and Lady Fermor's parting was made with a handshake and the waving of Theodora's handkerchief. Lord Fermor raised his hat to her as the train moved out of the station.

Theodora sat back in her corner, oppressed with the feeling that she was acting not only against the feelings, but against the interests of the man she loved. But as she had said truly, her nature was too faithful and constant for her to forget, all at once, the claims of an earlier love.

She reached London within an hour, and driving

to the great house in Queen's Gate, went at once to her father's study and knocked on his door, with the little familiar rap she had used since her childhood and which was always met with a welcoming response. Theodora did not wait for an answer this time, but went in and placed her arms about her father's neck before he could rise from his chair. Then both of them burst into a passion of tears.

Seymour recovered himself first.

"Why did you come?" he asked brokenly. "I am afraid it was against your husband's wishes."

"Did you think I could stay away?" asked Theodora. "What a heart you must think I have! When I remember from the time I was a little girl, all your goodness to me—oh! how could you think I could forget it!"

"Theodora," said Seymour solemnly, raising his hand, "I swear to God I never meant to do that man an injury, nor do I believe he meant to do me an injury. He struck me first and I struck him back. As for the money, I was crazy when I took it, and I restored every dollar of it. When it came to the running away from prison, I asked no man's pardon for that. I heard that you, a little helpless child, were ill and alone, and I went to you. I took my own money I had earned in prison. If I have done you any wrong, I have tried to atone for it."

"Hush! hush!" cried Theodora, weeping again, "you never did any human being a conscious wrong —as for the money you gave me, it was only a part

of what you did for me. Look at the house in which I live, and Barleywood, which you chose for yourself. It was like that always."

"Did Fermor object to your coming?" asked Seymour.

Those who have lived in such intimacy as Theodora and her father, cannot deceive each other when they would. Theodora answered:

"He made no objection in words."

"You should not have come," said Seymour, and to this Theodora answered as she would have answered in like case to Fermor. "You would have come to me in the same circumstances."

"Have you seen Lord Castlemaine?" asked Seymour anxiously.

"Yes," replied Theodora calmly, but in a tone which showed there had been a collision between Lord Castlemaine and herself. "I don't think Lord Castlemaine will again give me his opinion on any question concerning my personal relations with anyone." Then taking off her hat, Theodora said: "I have come to remain the night and, as Fermor says truly, we must wait a few days and think carefully over what course to pursue."

It was now nearly four o'clock, and Theodora, following her plan of giving no indication of the agitation of her spirits, ordered tea in the drawing-room and sat there with her father as she had done a year ago, when she had first met with the man with whom her heart as well as her life was now eternally bound.

As she sat in her familiar place doing the well-known things, the past year seemed to her a brilliant, tumultuous and agitated dream, full of deep joy and sharp pain.

Seymour had recovered his patience and composure. Theodora's tenderness soothed and consoled him. In the midst of their quiet talk, the door opened and a young ecclesiastic was ushered in.

"I am Father Mina," he said, bowing to Theodora and speaking English with an Italian accent. "I am Secretary of his Eminence, Cardinal Fontarini. I believe I am addressing Lady Fermor."

Theodora bowed and introduced Seymour, and Father Mina took a chair.

"I am always deeply interested in His Eminence," Theodora replied; "he has ever been most kind to me."

"His Eminence sends me to you with a message. He is in London almost incognito, and he wishes to avoid publicity, as he is very far from strong. He begs me to say to you, that he would be most pleased to see you any time to-morrow at his hotel." Father Mina named a small and quiet hotel in an old and distant part of town.

"Pray say to His Eminence," replied Theodora, "that I shall have pleasure in waiting upon him at any hour convenient to himself. Would eleven o'clock in the morning suit him?"

"I am quite sure it would," replied Father Mina, "as I know he has no engagement at that hour."

Father Mina would not remain longer or even accept the cup of tea which Theodora offered him, but took his leave. To Theodora this chance of talking with Cardinal Fontarini seemed singularly opportune. He had been to her a powerful friend in the days of storm and stress. It had occurred to her, coming up in the train, that she would like to consult some disinterested friend, like Ashburton or Father White, but she knew well it would not be agreeable to Lord Fermor that she should seek the advice of either one of them in a matter so closely affecting their mutual relations; but this coming interview with Cardinal Fontarini was so unexpected and so unsought by her that, as she was prone to tender superstitions, it seemed to her almost the intervention of God.

The next morning when Theodora reached the hotel where Cardinal Fontarini was lodged, she was shown into an old-fashioned sitting-room. Cardinal Fontarini was reclining in a great chair by the fire and his table was littered with letters and papers. He was a tall, stern-looking old man, but his eye was not unkind. Theodora's greeting was respectful, and even affectionate, and the Cardinal congratulated her upon her improved appearance and inquired after her father. Then he expressed gratification at her entering the Church and hoped she was happy in her recent marriage. This gave Theodora the opportunity she desired.

"It seems like an answer to a prayer, that your

Eminence should have come to London now for these few days. I want some advice, some help, and my recollection of your kindness in years past, gives me confidence to ask it of your Eminence."

The Cardinal bowed in acknowledgment and said:

"Such help and advice as I can give you is always at your service. I am under the impression that a Catholic woman married in a great Anglican family, has her difficulties."

"It is hardly that, your Eminence," said Theodora after a pause. "Although I am sure Lord Fermor would have preferred I should remain an Anglican, he has made no active opposition to my religion and did not demur to any promises required from him upon our marriage. He has been unfailingly kind about it, but it is something else most painful——" Theodora stopped. Her dark eyes filled with tears. She had never felt any fear of this austere old man. In the old days he had always understood her tortured heart and had listened to her sympathetically, as he did now while she told him the painful story that had come to her from Lord Castlemaine only twenty-four hours before. She omitted nothing, and even spoke of her overwhelming indignation which had made her practically invite Lord Castlemaine to leave her house.

"That," murmured the Cardinal in a low voice, "seems to have been an extreme measure."

"Perhaps it was," replied Theodora; "for my-

self, I cannot regret it. But I do regret it on Lord Fermor's account. Your Eminence will admit it was a terrible moment, a dreadful thing, for a daughter to face."

"Quite so, but still it might have been differently managed. The question, though, to which you seek an answer, is, as I understand, what must your future course be."

"Yes," replied Theodora, "but I don't mean to ask whether I ought to give up my father or not—I mean only to ask—how I shall act so as to do my duty both by my husband and my father."

The Cardinal paused a moment and looked fixedly at Theodora. The old feeling came into her heart that this man had in him a rigidity of piety and aloofness which would be sure to give her a disinterested view.

"Some of the Fathers have maintained," he replied after a while, "that a wife can do no wrong if she acts on the command of her husband, but others have not held this to be sound. I should say that you are quite justified in principle, in refusing to give up association with your father. But having asserted and maintained your right, you should exercise it sparingly and with great discretion."

Theodora gave a sigh of relief. She had asserted her right, and was prepared to maintain it, and she was also prepared to exercise that right with the utmost regard for the feelings of her husband. A deep resentment toward Lord Castlemaine had grow up

in her heart since the day before, but she now saw the obligation of assuming a conciliatory attitude toward him.

"I thank your Eminence, and I shall follow your advice as strictly as I can, but the trouble goes deeper. I find that in England there is a totally different conception of family ties from what prevails in America. There is a different conception of the position of a wife. I cannot make myself into an Englishwoman in fact as I am in law. I wish to do everything possible for my husband, not only because he is my husband, but because I love him; but I sometimes fear that I shall offend him without knowing why."

"That is common in all countries and ages," replied the Cardinal with a slight smile. "Do your duty as you see it and try not to offend your husband or any of his family or friends. I think, however, they have no right to require you to hold no further intercourse with your father."

Theodora remained only a short time after that. When she rose to go the Cardinal rose, too, and Theodora noticed for the first time that his large, spare form had grown feeble.

"I think," he said, "this may be our last meeting. When I return to Rome, I scarcely expect to leave it again. I went to Paris to see a dying friend, one of the French Cardinals, a life-long friend of mine from the days when we were young seminarians. I came to England for two days upon a similar er-

rand; an old friend and ecclesiastic whose time on earth is short expressed a strong wish to see me. It seems to me that my own time should be coming rapidly. I only ask that it find me at work in the cause of God. Farewell! Write me within a month, and if I am living, I will answer."

Theodora went out, fortified in her resolution. When she stepped from her carriage at her father's door, she saw Lord Castlemaine coming out of Castlemaine House. The influence of Cardinal Fontarini was still strong upon Theodora and made her turn into the gateway and meet Lord Castlemaine half way. She held out her hand and said quietly:

"Perhaps I was rash in what I said yesterday at King's Lyndon. I can't apologise for it, but I can say that I hope we may remain friends."

Lord Castlemaine had never been able to remain at enmity with a really clever and attractive woman. He felt a thoroughgoing contempt for the Flora Bellendens of this world, not because they broke the moral law, but because they were invariably women of bad taste. He grinned cheerfully, however, at Theodora, and taking her small outstretched hand, shook it cordially.

"You were rather hard on me yesterday," he said, "but I am of a forgiving nature. I am beginning to believe that the Americans are developing an entirely new and not merely a composite race, in which the women are *sui generis*. As far as I can see, Fermor has not had his own way once since he became

engaged to be married to you. That is entirely foreign to British traditions. To make it still queerer, he seems to be perfectly happy and satisfied—not a dejected captive like my brother-in-law, Joshua Battle. You seem to have tied Fermor with garlands of roses instead of iron chains, as my sister Lady Susan has done with poor old Battle."

Theodora smiled a little. It was a relief to her sad and overcharged heart that Lord Castlemaine could adopt his usual tone of banter toward her.

"I must be perfectly frank with you," she said. "I never contemplated at any moment, even if Lord Fermor should request it, the giving up of my father —I cannot and I will not do that, but I will do anything else for Lord Fermor's happiness or interest."

She spoke these words in her softest manner and with her most appealing glance. One would have thought that she was conceding everything at the moment that she was claiming everything. Lord Castlemaine looked at Theodora searchingly and indulged himself in his usual plain speaking.

"You speak softly, but you mean sternly," he said. "Remember, this question involves Fermor's whole personal and political future. It involves, also, the future of any children you may have. You have undoubtedly damaged Fermor by becoming a Roman Catholic. Don't talk to me about religious liberty and freedom of conscience. It is all poppycock in any country where there is a State Church. Religious toleration means religious intoleration,

and you, my dear lady, with your little hands, cannot move these mountains. Of course, you will go your own gait, but allow me the privilege of saying, 'I told you so.'"

Lord Castlemaine gallantly escorted Theodora to her father's door and there left her. Theodora went upstairs carrying with her a heavy heart. Was she indeed a millstone around Fermor's neck? He might have married an Englishwoman who could have brought him all the money he needed and who would have been of a nature and temperament to help rather than hinder him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### The Truce of Love

Theodora walked straight to the library, expecting to see her father there. Instead, Ashburton was standing, his back to the fire in the national attitude of an Englishman. When Theodora recognised him, her sad preoccupied manner changed and she greeted him warmly. She would have liked to pour out to him all her perplexities, but she was restrained by the feeling that Lord Fermor would not like that she could consult Ashburton in any matter between Fermor and herself. It was enough that she had consulted Cardinal Fontarini.

Ashburton, however, at once opened the subject.

"Mr. Seymour sent for me this morning," he said, "and told me the painful story of his life. I felt deeply for him, for you and for Lord Fermor."

Theodora sat down on the sofa, took off her gloves and threw back the rich dark fur that showed off her delicate and distinguished beauty.

"I am glad my father sent for you," she said, "you are so practical, so clear-headed—you see things as they are."

"I try to, anyway," replied Ashburton. "I found your father predetermined to return to America and serve the three-months' term in prison and accept any

other penalty which he might have incurred. That was so radical a measure that I persuaded him to send for Wyndham, who might give us the American view of things. He is here now with your father in his private room. Wyndham's first impression was that a pardon might still be secured from the Governor of the State, but it would have to be on your application. Wyndham tells me that in America, the plea of a man for mercy is not generally heeded, but the plea of a woman is extremely likely to prevail."

"I would go to America at once," replied Theodora, and then remembering that Ashburton was an Englishman, she added, "I should ask Lord Fermor's consent, and I am sure he would give it. One thing, however, must be understood. I can't give up my father or forbid him my house or fail to come to see him. My father, as you know, is the last person on earth to make any claim. He would efface himself if possible, but I believe at his time of life and feeble as he is growing, a final separation from me would kill him."

"You are right," replied Ashburton earnestly, "all the forces against your father are those of interest. He has been, I know, the best of fathers to you. He is old, he is feeble, he is broken-hearted. Read in the Gospels and see what Christ would have you to do. I don't say you ought to defy your husband and thereby make the worst of this complication which is certainly against Fermor's interests, but I

do say that you should not be required to give up all further association with your father."

Theodora felt a brightening and uplifting of the soul. It was as if she breathed a purer atmosphere. Like Cardinal Fontarini, Ashburton had dwelt upon the moral and ethical side of the question. Yes, she would read in the Gospels, not only concerning her relations with her father, but how she could accommodate those ideals as far as possible with her relations to her husband. Fermor had always attached consequence to Ashburton's views because Ashburton was a man eminently practical. Theodora had not consulted Ashburton, but Ashburton had voluntarily given her his opinion.

Just then the door opened and Wyndham entered. He came up to Theodora and, taking her hand, said with tears in his eyes:

"When I think that it was through me all this distress has come upon you and Mr. Seymour, it almost breaks my heart. Mr. Seymour told me of the newspaper which was sent to Lord Castlemaine. I recalled having left that newspaper at Mrs. Bellenden's house in Chester Street."

Theodora's face changed at the mention of Mrs. Bellenden. Lord Fermor had never once spoken Mrs. Bellenden's name to his wife, and this very caution on his part, together with Mrs. Bellenden's attitude toward herself, had made Theodora's quick wit surmise that there had been some link in the past between her husband and Mrs. Bellenden. Insulted

pride and resentment shone in her dark eyes. All the woman in her was aroused. She had the nimble American mind which reaches conclusions quickly. Lord Castlemaine had told her, in so many words, that if he could have reached England in time, he would have used what influence he could to prevent the marriage. And it was Mrs. Bellenden who had dared to attempt the disposition of her destiny! Theodora's conscience received a powerful access of courage from her offended pride and indignation. She looked full into the faces of the two men before her and said with cool promptness:

"Mrs. Bellenden, I imagine, is a woman of very wicked character and conduct, and capable of odious things."

Theodora was to return to King's Lyndon by the three o'clock train, which gave her only half an hour to be with her father. Ashburton and Wyndham arranged to go with her to the station, and Theodora went into her father's room to spend the last half hour with him. He was sitting in his great armchair and looked old and shrivelled and broken-hearted. Theodora knelt by him and put her arms about him as if he were a child. Always the relations of father and daughter had been reversed between them. It was Theodora who now assumed a protecting tenderness over her father.

"Dearest papa," she said, "Lord Fermor will not require that I shall give you up, and if he did I could not do it."

"That was what I told Lord Castlemaine," replied Seymour, his pale old face working with emotion. "I told him it would not be worth while for him to forbid you to come to me."

"It would be perfectly useless, and if you tried to hide yourself from me, I would search the whole world over for my father."

"I told Lord Castlemaine that, too. But, Theodora, are you acting right by your husband and his family?"

"Yes, I am doing what is right."

"I am afraid, my dear, that you are doing it because you want to do it."

"Perhaps so," replied Theodora, rising. "I could not abandon you, any more than you could abandon me. There you have the whole matter."

Then she drew her chair up to him and told him of Lord Fermor's kindness, his indulgence, and of her conviction that he would think as she did on the subject. She was not so confident as she claimed to be, but she succeeded in convincing Seymour, whose spirits perceptibly improved.

When it was time for Theodora to go to the train, the big landau came to the door and Theodora, with Wyndham and Ashburton, entered it. There was but little time at the huge and crowded station. Wyndham and Ashburton barely managed to thrust Theodora into a compartment ten seconds before the train moved off. Theodora had the compartment to herself. She sat back in the corner, wearied

with the racking emotions of the last twenty-four hours.

As the train sped out of London, darkness and fog were left behind and the soft glow of the late March afternoon lay upon the rich and beautiful landscape. The sunshine entered into Theodora's soul. After all, she was returning to the man she loved, and he was her husband. Everything could be arranged—everything must be arranged. It was impossible that a husband and wife who loved each other and who were experienced enough to be discreet, should throw away their happiness.

When the train drew into the little station at King's Lyndon, Lord Fermor was waiting for his wife and put her at once into his motor. It was close, so that they were quite alone. Theodora, like many women, was not less attractive for the stress of feeling. A faint colour which was unusual with her, glowed in her cheeks. She was glad to be once more with Fermor, and told him so. Fermor in his cool English way was equally pleased to have his wife back.

By tacit agreement, nothing was said concerning Theodora's visit. They were not a boy and girl to spoil the joy of their meeting by dragging in a painful subject any sooner than was necessary.

There was still time for a walk in the park, and the fresh cool air was sweet after London. The walk was meant to last for an hour, but nightfall and a splendid moonrise found Theodora and Fer-

mor still in the open. Never had Theodora used more winning arts with Fermor. She had been told that it was her duty to conciliate him, particularly at this time—and is was so easy, so sweet! They both felt a sort of intoxication of controlled joy and tenderness, deeper for its restraint—the joy and tenderness of the matured soul.

It was their first separation for a day since their marriage, and the joy and tenderness of meeting again they put into half-laughing words, and later into an eloquent silence. Even when they returned to the house, they lingered on the terrace, watching the moon-lit lake, the shimmering light and darkness of the shadowy night. It seemed to Theodora a good omen that they should have had such hours of exaltation before facing the heart-breaking problem which clamoured for settlement.

Theodora had barely time to dress for dinner, but when she came into the drawing-room she was in striking good looks. Her beauty, of the delicate American type, was accentuated by her artful mode of dress. Lord Fermor could not have told to save his life what the difference was between his wife's clothes and other women's clothes, except that Lady Fermor's always seemed to be as much a part of herself as the plumage of a dove or the radiant wings of the butterfly. To-night, she wore a shimmering gown the colour of the palest violets, with little glints of gold all over it, and her hair was crowned with a coronet of violets. At the small round din-

ner table in the vast and splendid dining-room, Theodora told Fermor across the shaded candles what she wished the butler and footmen to know. She spoke of her father with the greatest composure and also told of receiving the message from Cardinal Fontarini upon her arrival in London and of going to see him. Fermor did not tell her something that had happened in her absence—a covert insinuation in the newspaper in the market town of King's Lyndon, implying that Lord Fermor's sympathies were no longer with the Established Church and that, in a dispute which was brewing between the Bishop and one of the clergy, Lord Fermor would probably be glad if both sides could be worsted. This was a specimen of what had been gathering since Lord Fermor's marriage, and which had undoubtedly weakened him politically in the division. Also, Reyburn, the shoemaker, had written Fermor a letter saying that the report was going about among Socialist circles and workingmen's meetings in the divisions, that Lord Fermor shortly intended to establish a Roman Catholic chaplain at King's Lyndon, and that a chapel was about to be built for that purpose. It was all ridiculous and childish nonsense, but it meant a loss of popularity followed by a loss of votes.

After dinner Fermor and Theodora went into the little yellow room where Theodora was in the habit of playing her violin while Lord Fermor smoked. He was passionately fond of music and at no time

were Theodora's charms more powerful with him than when, standing in the glow of lamp and fire, she showed the exquisite grace which violin playing often develops in a woman. He had never ceased to wonder at the strength in her delicate arms and hands, but that was the way in everything about her. This delicate creature had the steady resolution of a dozen tall and majestic Lady Susan Battles.

It was Theodora's fixed intention to charm Lord Fermor at that moment, and she succeeded. Never had she played better; never had she chosen with more art what would please him in the way of soft and emotional music. Fermor realised that it would be difficult to refuse this woman anything, but difficulties do not mean impossibilities to an Englishman. Of one thing, however, he was quite sure—that nothing could impair the love and respect he felt for his wife.

When Fermor's cigar was finished and Theodora had played a last cadenza and laid down her violin, she came and sat down on the sofa by Fermor. She laid her head on his shoulder and received his praise and kisses; then the real battle began.

"I want to tell you all that happened in London," she said, looking at him with that peculiarly fascinating gaze which was hers. "I told my father what he knew before, that I could no more give him up than he could give me up."

Fermor said nothing. She was, perhaps, right, but it would mean a great deal of discomfort for both of them.

"Then," continued Theodora, "when Cardinal Fontarini sent for me, I told him of my perplexities. You understand, I did not take them to him voluntarily. Only, as he had given me good counsel in days past, and saved me from the rage of the Fontarini family, I felt sure that his advice would be valuable. So it was. He told me that I was perfectly right in the principle of not giving up the association with my father in any possible event, not only because he is my father, but because he has been the best, the most devoted—oh! you *must* know how good papa has always been to me! But the Cardinal also said, while I should stand by this principle firmly, I should exercise it with the greatest discretion and care for your wishes."

"Admirable," said Fermor, smiling; "the only difficulty is in the combination."

"At all events, I felt sure that I was not quixotic after all. Then when I went home, I found Major Ashburton there with my father talking about it, and without asking him to advise me, he expressed himself exactly as the Cardinal had done. Mr. Wyndham also came. Of course he took the purely American view, and I don't think it ever occurred to him that I should be expected to give up association with my father."

"My dear Theodora," said Fermor with calm

good humour, " you will act as all true women act—from their hearts. If I, instead of your father, were concerned, you would do the same for me. You would drag me up from Devil's Island to the Legion of Honour, as Madame Dreyfus did. Let us say no more about it. You will consider my interests, no doubt, but I can hardly expect you to take the same view as an Englishwoman would. I shall love you just as much though, and perhaps a trifle more."

Fermor took Theodora's hand, but she withdrew a little and her face assumed the kind of statuesque repose which was a sure indication of her displeasure.

" I discovered, quite by accident, how the newspaper was sent to Lord Castlemaine. You will recall that Lord Castlemaine said to me, that if he had known this in time, he would certainly have tried to prevent our marriage."

" My father committed an outrage," said Fermor quickly.

" The newspaper was left—in Chester Street—and was sent anonymously to Lord Castlemaine."

Fermor's English composure was not easily disturbed, but now he coloured slightly and looked away from Theodora.

Theodora's suppressed indignation communicated itself to Fermor, who mumbled something between his teeth, which Theodora understood to be objurgations of Mrs. Bellenden.

" I beg you will understand," he said to Theodora, " that as far as that woman is concerned, she

has not the slightest claim upon my consideration. I take upon myself the whole blame in the beginning, as a gentleman must, but the last five years I paid for my folly. I thought I had paid enough for it, but it seems the price is to be exacted of you, too. I am sorry—I apologise for it, but I can't help it."

Having brought Fermor down into the dust, so to speak, Theodora, like a true woman, proceeded to forgive him. Her face changed, her eyes filled with tears.

"It is past," she said; "let us never speak of it again."

Then, there was the truce of love.

## CHAPTER XXV

### God and Many Men

Easter, that year, came the middle of April, and Lord Fermor meant to signalise his entrance into public life and the rehabilitation of King's Lyndon by entertaining a large political party. There were some additional guests, Marsac and his wife, the Wyndhams, and two of the Battle girls. Lady Susan was tempted to withdraw her acceptance for Jane, when she heard that Wyndham was to be at King's Lyndon, but finding that Jack Thornycroft was included in the party, was induced to take hazardous chances. Lord Castlemaine, of course, was to be of the party, and before Theodora could mention it, Fermor had put down Seymour's name among the list of guests. This was in February, before the painful facts concerning Seymour had been revealed. Seymour did not care for such things, but Theodora had written him that he must stay at least one night under the roof of King's Lyndon with her other guests and as a compliment to Lord Fermor and herself, and after that he would be allowed to retire to Barleywood.

Nothing had been said of this invitation, but Theodora's mind was made up as a part of the pact with her conscience, that she would not insist on Sey-

mour's presence at the house party, and so told Fermor. He replied with kindness, that perhaps for Seymour's own sake, it would be best to let him remain at Barleywood, which would certainly be his preference.

The preparation for entertaining a party of thirty guests for three days took up much of Theodora's time. The presence of the Prime Minister and his wife was to be made a political occasion. A meeting in the interests of the party was to be held in the market town on Easter Monday, when the Prime Minister and Fermor and two or three of the other guests were to address a political meeting. Fermor suggested that Theodora should, with some of the other ladies, address a meeting, but Theodora only looked at him with wondering eyes and said:

"I shouldn't know what to say."

"Don't say anything," replied Fermor, laughing; "only talk and look pretty."

But this was obviously so foreign to Theodora that Fermor said nothing more about it. She would appear upon the platform and would be escorted to and from her carriage. Her charm and grace would not be without their effect. Within his heart of hearts, Fermor had always doubted whether these addresses by ladies were of any practical benefit. Nobody ever listened to what they said unless it was totally revolutionary. Their dress and appearance, however, were closely scrutinised, and in this last respect Theodora was a valuable ally.

Theodora, at first, had entered into these plans with enthusiasm. She felt like a girl going to her first ball, so new to her was happiness and a heart free from care. All the arrangements had been completely and skilfully made, but the terrible revelations of the last few days had driven it out of Theodora's mind. She was recalled to it, however, as the day approached. It was her habit to write to her father daily, and she had often alluded to his coming down at Easter, fearing that at the last he might beg off. Now, however, she made no mention of the Easter party and secretly hoped that her father would of himself, decline to come. This hope was realised within three days from her return from London.

One morning she went into Fermor's study and laid before him a letter from Seymour. It was plain and unstudied, like Seymour himself, and not the letter of an educated man, but Theodora thought it the more touching.

"I can't come to you, my darling Theodora," the letter ran. "I know that you and Lord Fermor would treat me kindly and would never ask me to take a back seat, but all the same it is not right for me to go, and to tell you the truth, I never did want to be at King's Lyndon during the Easter party. I am acting on the advice of Major Ashburton and Mr. Wyndham in staying in London in my house, and I think a crisis will come pretty soon. Mr. Wyndham has been writing to America to influential men he

knows. He says the Governor will grant me a pardon. When I think of what I have brought on you, I can't sleep at all."

Theodora attempted to read the letter to Fermor, but broke down weeping. Fermor soothed her and encouraged her to go up to London next day for a few hours to see her father.

This Theodora did, and was shocked to see the change in Seymour. He looked haggard beyond words and was more like a man of eighty than one of sixty. But he did not lack for attention. Ashburton and Wyndham were devoted in their kindness to him, and visited him daily.

He brightened up under Theodora's visit and her promise to come again in a few days. Theodora returned home more anxious about Seymour than she had yet been.

It was arranged that during the three days when Wyndham would be a guest at King's Lyndon, Ashburton, who had no taste for such parties, and had asked to come at some other time, should see Seymour daily. Theodora's concern about her father touched Fermor, and he voluntarily went alone to London twice to see Seymour, and once with Theodora. The passionate affection between father and daughter was moving enough to Fermor, but through it all ran a real and painful apprehension. He was, like Lord Castlemaine, a firm believer in atavism and thought that the element of weakness in Seymour's character, the want of resolution which had made him

a criminal, was a dangerous strain to introduce into a family. He yearned for children, but if they were given him, especially sons, there would always be that unspoken fear that along with Seymour's gentleness and generosity might come that fatal weakness.

Lord Castlemaine was not a good man to inherit from, but Fermor knew that a man who was all resolution was less dangerous as a progenitor than a man who was absolutely without resolution. If Seymour had been a strong man he might have saved Theodora much of what she had suffered with Pietro Fontarini. Nevertheless, Fermor, although troubled by these thoughts, was all kindness and respect toward Seymour. In return Seymour was almost piteous in his gratitude.

Theodora had herself written a pretty note to Lord Castlemaine asking him to come to King's Lyndon whenever he liked, but especially before the great party arrived, and had received a good-humored reply. Lord Castlemaine at the time was enjoying one of his choicest dissipations. He was in his seat in the House of Lords night after night, professing to fight the battles of his party and making the Prime Minister shudder at such dangerous support. Lord Castlemaine not only denounced measures, but men, with a savage eloquence which made him dreaded alike by friend and foe. When he supported a measure of his own party, he was sure to find out every weakness in it and to exercise freely his wit, which was a trifle more dangerous than his invective. He was re-

warded by a large attendance on the Opposition benches and much space in the newspapers. These were sources of pagan pleasure to him, and this, together with the Circean spell of London, kept him in town. He vigorously denounced the practice of running away from London on Sunday, and declared that he would rather smell London smoke and sniff London fog than dwell in the gardens of the Hesperides.

The spring was coming on apace. Never had Fermor seen so early and beautiful a season at King's Lyndon. The snowdrops and crocuses showed their pretty faces shyly everywhere. The weather-fowl on the lake made the early morning resonant with their shrill, cheerful cries. All over the place sounded the sharp twitter of the robins and blackbirds. The clear, austere air grew warm at midday, and the twilights were soft and long. Theodora's spirits were perturbed and she lived in a tumult of ever-changing emotion. Her reading of the newspapers, and chance conversation with the people of their own class in the neighbourhood, convinced her that her religious belief was undoubtedly affecting Fermor's political fortunes unfavourably. But he loved her—of that she was certain, and it was more than she had hoped for in the beginning. It was as if, having picked up a stone, it had turned to a lovely crystal in her hand.

Although matters between Lord Castlemaine and herself had been smoothed over, Theodora felt that

the first collision between them would not be the last. She rather looked forward to the house party as affording a distraction from her own insistent thoughts and feelings.

Good Friday dawned in rain and darkness. Theodora had ordered her motor at the unprecedented hour of half-past five in order to attend six-o'clock service, which was the only one of the day in the little church at Hillborough. This was excitedly discussed by the servants, who had realised that Theodora was mistress at King's Lyndon and found it difficult to reconcile her calm assumption of authority with her gentleness and habit of deferring in most things to Lord Fermor.

When Theodora came out of her room in the darkness of the rainy dawn, at half-past five, Fermor, with hat and greatcoat, joined her, much to her surprise.

"I don't care to have you going in the rain and darkness alone to Hillborough," he said.

"Thank you," said Theodora with a bright smile, slipping her arm within his.

They went down and got into the closed car, which started off rapidly. Theodora leaned back in her corner, absorbed, as Fermor knew, in religious meditation. It was a thing of which he knew little and had seen less, and it seemed to make a division between himself and his wife. But he respected it and even wished that he could feel as Theodora did.

It was still dark when they reached the little town, and the congregation, with umbrellas and goloshes, was trooping quietly into the church. The altar, stripped of its ornaments to express the desolation of the world on the day of the Crucifixion, the door of the tabernacle wide open and emptiness within, the two altar candles that made mere points of light in the darkness, impressed Fermor more than he expected. At a small side altar, radiant with lights and fragrant with flowers, the Host reposed.

Fermor had seen the most imposing rites of Catholicism celebrated in Rome. He had heard the trilling and the wailing of the Miserere in the Sistine chapel, and had seen the great basilicas in the majestic gloom and awful sorrow of Good Friday. But it had struck no personal note within him. This time it seemed to him as if every soul present in the little dark church were mourning the sufferings and the death of Christ. The profound silence was broken only by the movements and whispered words of the priest at the altar.

Kenelm Redcliffe, by his dignity, his grace at the altar, his noble and spiritual face, had in him the power to compel respect for what he was doing, and it was to commemorate the death of God. A tenseness of emotion possessed the silent kneeling figures with eyes fixed upon the altar which represented the doom of Christ. The priest with uplifted hands seemed like one of those disciples

who were actually present at the awful tragedy of Calvary. At the moment of the Elevation, when the stillness if possible grew more still and every heart seemed to be united with the Heart of the suffering Lord, the sharp sound of the wooden tracklet, which presented with a singular and startling realism the nailing of the hands and feet of Christ to the cross, smote the air. Until that moment the Crucifixion had seemed to Fermor a far-off mysticism; now it was as if it had happened yesterday. He glanced at Theodora. She was leaning forward, her face buried in her hands, and Fermor could see that she was silently weeping. Many other persons in the crowded church were weeping. To all, the Crucifixion was a real and present thing. When the mass was over, all present rose and went forward and knelt at the altar rails. Those for whom there was no room, knelt in the aisles. Father Redcliffe took from the altar a large crucifix of brass and ivory, passing it along the altar railing, and every person kneeling there reverently kissed the feet of the sculptured Christ. It was done with such a fervour of pity and devotion that it might have been the feet of the dead Christ.

Theodora was one of the last to go up to the altar rail. All went in turn, and Fermor, accustomed to the recognition of rank in church, was amazed to see working men and women crowding in advance of the few well-dressed persons present. The work-

ing people had to go to their daily toil and could not afford to wait.

As Theodora rose from her knees in the aisle and went forward, an impulse perfectly unknown in Fermor's whole previous life, took hold of him. One did not need to be a Roman Catholic to kiss the feet of Christ. He rose, went up the aisle, and knelt by Theodora. As she bent over and kissed the feet nailed to the cross, Father Redcliffe saw Fermor kneeling at her side, and without the least hesitation held the Crucifix out to him, and Fermor reverently kissed the feet. He rose as Theodora did and they returned to their seats. Theodora was keenly conscious of Fermor's action. Like all women, she was disposed to overrate impulses, and it seemed to her as if Fermor were already one with her in religion.

In a few minutes, with the rest of the congregation, Fermor and Theodora left the church. It was still but faintly light. Fermor put Theodora in the car and shut the door. Theodora threw herself in his arms and kissed him.

"Don't attach too much importance to what I did," said Fermor gravely, "but I will say this, that I now understand better than before, the impulse that made you a Roman Catholic. It was wonderfully impressive."

Fermor was not surprised, however, to hear, two days afterward, that it was rumoured he had become a Roman Catholic. He promptly denied this, but

he reckoned that his act would cost him several hundred votes in a close contest.

The day continued dark and rainy and it was as if the world had taken a sudden plunge backward into winter. In the afternoon, as Theodora was passing along the hall she looked out of the window, and to her surprise, she saw her father on the terrace. Although it was raining, his head was bare and he stood looking about him with a strange uncertainty. Before the footman could reach the door, Theodora ran and opened it and drew her father within the hall. He had on no greatcoat and was soaked with rain. He put his arms about Theodora and kissed her passionately. Theodora, accustomed to think and act promptly, saw at a glance that something was wrong with Seymour, and after telling the footman to ask Lord Fermor to come to her at once, led Seymour into the little yellow room, where the fire was sparkling. Fermor came in immediately and Seymour shook hands warmly with him and then turned to Theodora.

"I am glad that Lord Fermor has come," he said. "I wanted to talk to him on some business matters. He will no doubt stay to dinner with us."

Seymour's eyes had in them a strange look of distress and he seemed struggling to recollect himself. Theodora glanced at Fermor. There was evidently something quite wrong with Seymour. Fermor rang the bell, and when the footman came directed a dressing-gown and slippers to be brought

at once to Mr. Seymour. Theodora was meanwhile getting Seymour's coat off him against his feeble protest.

"My dear Theodora," he was saying, "I don't see why you do this. It was never my habit, even in my roughest days, to appear before ladies like this. My child, you must not do it—at any rate before Lord Fermor, who is our guest."

"Never mind, Mr. Seymour," said Fermor, "your coat is a little wet and we think it best that you should change it. I suppose you lost your great-coat in the train."

"I haven't been in the train at all," said Seymour, looking with a puzzled expression from Fermor to Theodora, "I only came from my room a little while ago into my daughter's sitting-room. I didn't know that you were here."

Theodora took her little lace handkerchief and passed it over Seymour's white hair wet with the rain. He caught her hand and held it like another Lear once more in the presence of his Cordelia. Tears were dropping upon Theodora's cheeks, but she tried to speak cheerfully.

"Really, papa, you are not fit to be trusted alone. Come—put your feet to the fire, while I take off your shoes."

She knelt down, took off Seyour's sodden shoes and rubbed his chilled feet. Fermor went out of the room for a moment and came back again and whispered to Theodora:

"Rolfe will be here in ten minutes."

Dr. Rolfe was the physician whose house was at the end of the village nearest the park gates of King's Lyndon. It was plain that Seymour was out of his mind and yet dimly conscious that something was amiss. He took Theodora's left hand and looking at the third finger, said:

"Why are you wearing a wedding ring? I saw you myself when you took the wedding ring of that scoundrel, Pietro Fontarini, from your hand and threw it into the fire. Is it possible that you have married again without telling me?"

"You remember that I married Lord Fermor two months ago," said Theodora gently.

"No, my dear," replied Seymour with a look of distress, "I don't seem to remember anything. Some time ago I was living in London and you used to come to see me, but then I don't know how it happened, I find to-day that I am living at King's Lyndon and—I can't understand it."

It was piteous to hear him and still more piteous to see Theodora's tender ministrations. The one thing clear in Seymour's shattered mind was that Theodora still loved him—that she was still his child. In a quarter of an hour, Dr. Rolfe walked in—a keen-eyed man with a capacity for taking things in quickly. He asked Seymour a few questions to test his memory, which seemed defective, rather than absolutely gone, and he was conscious of his inability to answer correctly, and would say pathetically,

"I never forgot those things before." The doctor then said to him cheerfully:

"Come, Mr. Seymour, I think you had better take a nap now, and you will feel better to-morrow morning."

Seymour yielded at once and was led upstairs and put to bed in his old room. He dropped off quickly into sleep, and Theodora left Reyburn watching him and went downstairs with the doctor to her husband's study.

"It is not much so far," said Dr. Rolfe; "there is a slight blood clot on the brain. There are at present no serious symptoms, and a day's quiet and the mustard bath I gave Mr. Seymour, may restore him perfectly."

"It may be the beginning of the end," said Theodora in a low voice.

Dr. Rolfe made no reply, except to leave some simple directions, and went away, saying he would return in the evening.

The spectacle of pure devotion in a woman, is peculiarly appealing to a normal man, if that devotion is lavished upon a legitimate object. Fermor had never admired Theodora more than in her affectionate solicitude for her stricken father. She established herself in the room next Seymour's, ready to answer his slightest call, although Reyburn and a man servant were watching. She was not, however, unmindful of Fermor, and said to him:

"You can have an evening of uninterrupted read-

ing, as I don't expect you to remain here with me. I will come down to dinner."

Fermor returned to his study, where work awaited him.

At dinner time, Seymour was still half sleeping and apparently comfortable. Theodora asked to be excused from dressing for dinner and came down in the same simple black gown she had worn during the day, according to the custom she had acquired from the Roman ladies of wearing black on Good Friday. She strove to be cheerful, especially after Dr. Rolfe's evening visit, when he brought with him a white-capped nurse. The nurse, however, found her office a sinecure, as Theodora remained in the next room that night and many times went in to see how her father fared.

Fermor showed her deep sympathy and kindness, And when, soon after daylight, Theodora, who had thrown herself on a sofa and fallen into a troubled sleep, awakened, Fermor was standing by her. He told her that her father was sleeping quietly and, covering her up tenderly, persuaded her to try to sleep once more.

When Theodora came down to breakfast, Seymour was up and dressed by the doctor's permission and seemed quite normal. Nevertheless, Theodora felt that King's Lyndon was not the place for him at the time. She understood very well that the house party was not so much a matter of pleasure, as one of much political importance to Fermor. The pres-

ence of the Prime Minister meant much, and the visit had been planned with a view to its political effect in a doubtful division. Theodora had already determined upon her course of conduct and told Fermor so. It was among the surprises of his American wife that she always seemed to think and act for herself and then to inform him of her decision, and as the thing generally was sensible, no objection could be made.

She said to Fermor sitting by the table in his study at which he was looking over his letters:

"I think my father is in no condition to remain at King's Lyndon, but I can't let him go up to London. It seems to me, the best thing is to take him over to Barleywood, where Dr. Rolfe will be near and I can see him twice a day. Reyburn will go with him and take the best care of him. My mind will then be quite at rest."

"The plan seems good to me," answered Fermor, "I know you could not be happy unless you were near your father in his present state, so if Rolfe consents, we can take Mr. Seymour over this morning."

At that moment Dr. Rolfe entered and approved highly of the plan.

"We can never quite tell about patients in Mr. Seymour's condition," he said, "but he must have rest and quiet, and he will not have either unless he knows Lady Fermor is near him."

When Theodora proposed the plan to her father

telling him that a large party was expected at King's Lyndon, he agreed at once. He made no allusion to the painful disclosures of the last few days, and both Theodora and Fermor suspected that he had no memory of them. Theodora and Fermor drove with him in an open carriage to Barleywood. It was a pretty little place, and Seymour seemed infinitely pleased at being there, and near Theodora. The day, like the preceding one, was wet and gloomy, but Theodora's spirits were much improved. If her father had been really ill, she felt it impossible that she could have carried through the gaieties of the house party as planned, and yet to have postponed them would have been a detriment to Fermor.

And Fermor's interests, as well as Fermor himself, were first in the heart of Theodora.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### The Honours of King's Lyndon

The guests were to arrive by train, between four and six o'clock, but Lord Castlemaine came down by the noon train from London in time for luncheon.

Theodora received him pleasantly and cordially, but her air of making a graceful concession secretly amused Lord Castlemaine. He had never imagined himself placed in the position of being amiably tolerated.

At luncheon, Lord Castlemaine discussed the political condition in the division since Fermor's election.

"It is the most bigot-ridden division in England," he said, "and that is saying a great deal. Do you know, I bought a local newspaper at the station, and there was a long editorial pitching into you for going to the Good Friday services in the Roman Catholic church with your wife. If you were an esoteric Buddhist none of the dissenting and church people in the division would mind it in the least; but they are still thinking about the Popish Plot down here and the Scarlet Woman and all that sort of thing."

Theodora's face flushed, but good sense restrained her from saying anything.

"The editorial goes on to say that you went up to the communion rail with your wife and that you were probably, at this moment, in the hands of an emissary of the Jesuits."

Fermor smiled. He was prepared for misunderstandings and misrepresentation. Lord Castlemaine felt that he had got even with Theodora for what he considered her impertinence to him. The conversation then turned upon public affairs and the naval resources of Great Britain.

"We are paying the penalty of our folly of forty years ago in not recognising the South in your civil war," he said to Theodora. "That would have absolutely divided the United States and reduced you to the level of an aggregate of revolutionary republics. As it is, the United States has become the bully of the world. The one satisfaction we can get out of it is that the women from there bully the men to an extent never seen before in the world."

It was not a pleasant joke, especially as Lord Castlemaine had always dwelt upon the fact that Fermor had been very successfully bullied from the beginning by Theodora and her father. It was not, however, in Lord Castlemaine's power to bring a retort from Theodora, and she took his gibes with provoking serenity.

At four o'clock, Theodora, after having taken a final survey of the rooms prepared in the bachelors' wing and the state suite for the Prime Minister and his wife and the bedrooms for the other guests, came

down the stairs to be ready to receive them. Fermor and Lord Castlemaine were standing in the great hall where a fire blazing in the vast hearth made the dull day bright. When Theodora stepped down the grand staircase, her soft white gown trailing on the crimson carpet which deadened her light footfall, her quick glance caught sight of her father huddled in a chair at the end of the hall. Lord Castlemaine was saying angrily to Fermor:

"This is arrant nonsense. The fellow's mind is gone, and to have him here now is not only ridiculous, but shameful. He ought to be under restraint."

At that moment Seymour rose and tottered forward, and laid his arm appealingly on Fermor's.

"Don't turn me out," he pleaded, "I want to be with my daughter. Something I know is wrong with my brain, but if I am under the same roof with her, she can keep me quiet. It is so cold at Barleywood and so lonely."

Fermor took Seymour kindly by the arm and said:

"You shall not be turned out."

Lord Castlemaine's face became a deep purple and he said furiously to Fermor:

"So you propose to entertain with the Prime Minister, a man out of his head, who is a criminal besides! That, together with your subservience to your wife in religious matters, will not make you a very valuable acquisition to your party in the House."

Fermor's face flushed deeply and father and son

looked each other in the eyes with an antagonism which was almost enmity.

Theodora had sped down the stairs, and her father on seeing her uttered a cry of joy and almost fell into her arms. Then Reyburn suddenly appeared.

"I couldn't keep him back, sir," she said breathlessly. "We watched him all we could and I even tried to hold him when he broke away from me, and we didn't know where he had gone for half an hour, and then I got in the pony cart and came here."

Fermor taking Seymour by one arm, while Theodora held him tenderly by the other, with Reyburn following, they carried him upstairs to the room in the clock tower, the most remote and secluded in the house. Seymour, meanwhile, became perfectly quiet and tractable and agreed to remain quietly with Reyburn in the clock tower room.

As Fermor and Theodora went out of the room, they met Dr. Rolfe hurrying along the corridor.

"I went over to Barleywood to see Mr. Seymour," he said, "and found that he was missing, and they thought he had come here, as I find he has."

Dr. Rolfe went into Seymour's room while Fermor and Theodora remained outside. Theodora was trembling with excitement. The condition of her father, the apprehension that she was injuring her husband, and anger against Lord Castlemaine, all struggled within her, and she expressed this in broken words to Fermor. If she had ever felt a doubt of his love before, it would have vanished then.

Fermor realised all that was passing in her heart, and all he desired was that she should have the strength to go through the three days before her. At any moment the first instalment of guests might arrive.

In a moment or two, Dr. Rolfe came out.

"I think," he said, "Mr. Seymour will be perfectly quiet as long as Lady Fermor is near him. He has undoubtedly had a slight stroke, from which he may recover entirely, or another may follow. We cannot tell. We must keep him quiet and satisfied, and Lady Fermor is the only person who can do that. I am coming to see him twice a day for the present."

It was then time for Fermor to go to the station to meet the Prime Minister. Theodora remained in her father's room, watching Seymour quietly dozing, until the sound of wheels upon the gravel was heard. Then she descended to the hall, where she received her guests, the first to arrive being the Prime Minister.

Much curiosity had been felt by those of the invited guests, who had never met Theodora, as to Fermor's American wife. The result of the first afternoon and dinner and evening afterward, was of a mixed character. There could not be the slightest doubt of Theodora's grace, charm and exquisite gowns, but she was entirely too self-possessed. She had the air of having been born to her position, instead of having acquired it, and she lacked that

deprecatory spirit of an Englishwoman who shows her gratitude for her elevation.

The ladies found her "singular," as they conferred together in their boudoirs at midnight. She had not, even at dinner, appeared in any jewels, although it was supposed she had many splendid ones, and the Castlemaine family jewels were good ones. There was no doubt that she was immensely successful with the men, which did not conduce to her popularity with the women. Jane Battle was the exception, for she admired Theodora, and even loved her.

But if Lady Fermor were "singular," Dot Wyndham, the only other American among the women kind, was ten times more so. Dot treated Jack Thornycroft, whose adoration was open and unashamed, with a degree of haughtiness almost sacrilegious toward the heir to a baronetcy. She contrived to attach herself to the Prime Minister after dinner, to the amazement of all the British matrons present, and although the Prime Minister hated the United States as all Prime Ministers do, he found himself beguiled by this nineteen-year-old, who frankly preferred statesmen to guardsmen.

Lord Castlemaine confidently expected an exhibition of temper or coldness on Theodora's part toward himself, but was somewhat staggered to find her all grace and sweetness. He began to have a glimmer of why it was Theodora had carried things so irresistibly, not with a high hand, but with a gentle hand as far as Fermor went. She had clearly

carried her point with regard to her father, who, at that moment, was in the tower room. Lord Castlemaine heard Theodora calmly explain to the Prime Minister that her father had not been well for several days, and therefore would keep his room.

The Prime Minister received this serene announcement with equal composure. He was prepared for any sensational development where Americans were concerned. He disliked them cordially, but he was a statesman and had made it a point during his whole political career never to offend them.

At midnight, when the guests had separated, Fermor went to Theodora's boudoir. She had just returned from her father's room and had seen him sleeping quietly. The strain of the day had been great and she was lying back in a great chair, pale and dejected, but with unabated courage. Her evening gown, a splendid creation in blue and gold, seemed at odds with her pallor and sadness. She rose and threw herself into Fermor's arms and thanked him, as only a woman can, for his unfailing support during that trying day. Fermor felt a sense of triumph. This fearless creature who defied Lord Castlemaine and met as an equal the Prime Minister, whose family had held power since Agincourt and Poictiers, showed to him the sweetest gratitude, the tenderest affection. He could not exactly call it deference, but one does not look for deference from a woman who has been taught her sovereignty from the beginning.

Theodora assured Fermor that she was in no way forgetful of his interests.

"I know what it means, those terrible newspaper stories," she said, laying her cheek against her husband's. "Ever since Lord Castlemaine told me about my father, it has been like a knife in my heart that I have done you more harm than good. I would die rather than harm you."

What could any man who loved a woman like Theodora say to such words? It was true that she might have harmed him politically and temporarily, but she had bestowed upon him the glorious treasure of her love; she had restored to him the place he loved with an Englishman's passionate attachment to the land; she had recreated for him the splendour of womanhood, which had been lowered by his knowledge of Flora Bellenden. He had sometimes thought that if his mother had possessed half of Theodora's quiet courage, her own life would not have been marred as it had been, by Lord Castlemaine. In short, Fermor was something more than in love with Theodora. He saw, embodied in her, the ideal womanhood of which his mother was a pale and negative shadow. Theodora had her faults, her foibles, her wilful ways, her stubborn resolution, but her faults were chiefly the defects of her qualities. And, moreover, his American wife was in all things clearly an unknown quantity. This did not make her the less interesting.

The next day embraced the well-ordered programme of a large party in a great house. It was Easter

Sunday, and Theodora attended the services in the little church at Hillborough, returning before most of the guests had stirred in their beds.

Fermor accompanied the Prime Minister to the parish church, which was crowded. The newspaper stories had not been without their effect, and Fermor was made to feel in some way a loss of popularity; the Prime Minister, however, was greeted with the utmost cordiality. Lord Castlemaine did not trouble himself to go to church, nor to seek the society of his daughter-in-law. Theodora was glad of the opportunity to be with her father, who was now able to be dressed and to walk about his room. His memory, however, was still subject to strange lapses. Sometimes he recalled Theodora's marriage and again thought himself still master of King's Lyndon. Reyburn, with her usual taciturn devotion, remained with him and could exercise an influence second only to Theodora's.

At two o'clock, luncheon was served in the great dining-hall. The ringing of the courtyard bell summoned those who were loitering in the grounds, among others, Jane Battle and Jack Thornycroft. Both looked radiant, and Jane whispered to Theodora as they met in the hall:

"Jack has proposed four times to Dot Wyndham, so mamma can have nothing more to say about that match for me."

Just as the party was assembled in the dining-hall and Theodora was about to take her seat with the

Prime Minister on her right, the door at the farther end opened and Seymour entered. He looked perfectly well and clear-headed; was scrupulously dressed and, approaching Theodora, said to her in his natural voice:

"I felt so much better to-day, my dear, that I determined to give myself the pleasure of appearing at luncheon."

A terrible silence fell upon all. Theodora felt that every eye was fixed upon her, but above all, Lord Castlemaine's with a savage mixture of fury and laughter. It was one of the most agitating moments of Theodora's life and a moment when only courage could save her. She spoke calmly and affectionately to her father, introduced him to the Prime Minister, who stood not two feet way, his hand on the back of the chair. There was no place for Seymour at the table, but Theodora's eye sought Wyndham's. The next instant Wyndham melted away, as it were, and Seymour took his place. Then every one sat down and conversation began with nervous briskness.

Jane Battle sat next Seymour and earned Theodora's and Fermor's eternal gratitude by the tact she showed in engaging Seymour's attention. In the confused state of Seymour's mind, any moment might produce a catastrophe, but none occurred. It was so much Seymour's habit to remain in the background that his quiet effacement of himself was the most natural thing in the world.

The Prime Minister, whom neither a long lease of

power nor cordial dislike of Americans had wholly robbed of his kindness of heart, felt a real sympathy for Theodora. He thought Fermor very unwise in permitting Seymour's presence at King's Lyndon, but concluded that Theodora had simply befooled her husband into permitting Seymour, an escaped convict, to appear at King's Lyndon, and felt a curious sensation at sitting at the same table with him. But out of pure pity for Theodora, the Prime Minister went up to Seymour after luncheon was over, and made a civil inquiry about his health. To this Seymour replied quite rationally. Then, catching sight of Lord Castlemaine, Seymour went up to him as if to speak, but Lord Castlemaine deliberately turned his back and walked off in another direction. Fermor came up and, taking Seymour by the arm, led him away.

The day was calm and bright and the men were to smoke out on the terrace. Theodora went up to the Prime Minister and said with a tremulous smile:

"Will you come into the conservatory and let me show you my Easter lilies? Don't throw away your cigar, I will allow you to smoke."

The Prime Minister agreed. He was magnanimous toward this injudicious woman, who, he considered, would wreck the interests of his party in that division of Middlandshire, and he went with her cheerfully enough. When they had traversed the long, warm glass gallery, brilliant with sunshine and heavy with the perfume of flowers, they came to the

farther end where under darkened glass a mass of palms made a green solitude. Theodora suddenly turned to the Prime Minister and, putting her hand impulsively in his, said to him:

"How can I ever thank you enough for what you did to-day! I know all about the terrible stories printed about my father. He is an innocent man, and that will be proved when all the circumstances are known. Much as I love him, I did not mean to have him here, but his memory has been shattered in the last few days, and he does not seem always to know what he is doing."

The Prime Minister was not the man to disregard the appeal of an attractive woman.

"I feel deep sympathy for you. I admired your self-possession, and you may count on me as a friend."

As the Prime Minister said this, he felt an inward chuckle of amusement at himself. How great is the power of a charming woman! He reflected if he were married to Theodora, he might prove as great a fool as he reckoned Fermor to be. Of course the old man should have been securely kept away from the house; Fermor should never have accompanied Theodora to the Roman Catholic church, and she should assume the English attitude of feeling honoured by her alliance to the House of Castelmaine, and it was very plain that she was not. But in spite of these lapses, the Prime Minister forgave Theodora because she was so charming.

When the Prime Minister and Theodora reappeared upon the terrace in deep and amicable conversation, Lord Castlemaine's grim reflection was that the Prime Minister had been very successfully bamboozled by Theodora's dark eyes. Theodora spoke to Lord Castlemaine naturally and politely, but Lord Castlemaine had a very true suspicion that matters were by no means settled between them.

When Theodora went upstairs before tea time, Reyburn, anxious and remorseful, met her outside of Seymour's room.

"He was sitting in his chair, dressed and reading as quiet as may be, ma'am, and I went out of the room just for one moment and he slipped away by the other door. Before I could find him he was downstairs. But it shan't happen any more, that I promise you."

"I am sure it was not your fault, Reyburn," said Theodora, "but pray don't let it happen again, on Lord Fermor's account. He behaved most kindly, but of course it was very painful to him."

Reyburn, who would have laid down her life for Fermor, responded to this appeal. The story of Lord Castlemaine turning his back on Seymour had got into the servants' hall. Reyburn, in her sombre soul, hated Lord Castlemaine, and was an ardent partisan of Lady Fermor and her father.

"My husband came up to see me just now," she continued, "and he said as how some people in the market town was——" Reyburn stopped, her posi-

tion as an upper servant and her passionate devotion to Lord Fermor at odds. "Go on," said Theodora, authoritatively, "what did your husband tell you the people were saying?"

"Well, ma'am, as you directs me to tell, I'll say as my husband says, some people are down on Lord Fermor on account of what the newspapers is hinting about Mr. Seymour and his being here now. But others said as how Mr. Seymour was a good man and it was right for you, ma'am, and Lord Fermor, to stand by him. Reyburn has a meeting to-day of the factory hands, and he is going to speak about the Prime Minister speaking to Mr. Seymour, and Lord Castlemaine——"

Reyburn stopped. She had not acquired her husband's habit of speech concerning great people, and Theodora knew the grudge that this woman had cherished for thirty-five years against the father of her nursling.

Nothing escaped Fermor, and Theodora's civility to his father and the undoubted good will of the Prime Minister toward her, assured him that everything would go smoothly during the momentous visit. He said this to Theodora the first time they were alone together in the evening before dinner. He was becoming acquainted with a new phase of his wife's character and got a view of certain characteristics, which he very promptly classed as national characteristics.

"Do you suppose," she said, with a kind of soft

haughtiness which was peculiarly hers, "that anything Lord Castlemaine could say or do would discompose me in our own house?"

"Men and women are usually afraid of my father," replied Fermor, smiling; "he acknowledges very few restraints."

"People who don't acknowledge restraints should be treated as children," said Theodora. Then the husband and wife talked together frankly and with mutual sympathy of the strange and embarrassing incidents of the day, which had turned out better than either could hope. Theodora told Fermor what Reyburn had said concerning the sentiment about Seymour and themselves, and Fermor seemed gratified.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### The Hosts of King's Lyndon

In the evening, Theodora, having dressed early, went down into the drawing-room where her guests were to assemble. Lord Castlemaine was there in advance of her. As usual, Theodora wore few ornaments, and on her black hair was a coronet of violets with their fresh green leaves and a wreath of violets extended across the front of her bodice.

Lord Castlemaine, who was standing by the fireplace as Theodora came up, asked promptly:

"Why don't you wear some diamonds, like the other women? This would be a very proper occasion to wear the Castlemaine necklace and tiara."

"I don't think jewels suit my style," replied Theodora calmly. "They are not really becoming to many women. They suit the large English type better than any other."

"True," replied Lord Castlemaine, "the insignificant American figure and features do not suit tiaras, but now that you are an Englishwoman, you ought to follow English customs."

This onslaught did not discompose Theodora.

"I do," she replied, "but a woman's dress is too strictly personal to be governed by any rule."

"It is a species of snub to the other women that you should not wear jewels, and particularly family jewels."

Lord Castlemaine was growing fiercer in his eye and grin.

"When Lord Fermor requests it, then it will be time enough," was Theodora's answer in a tone of chilling sweetness.

"Of course," continued Lord Castlemaine, determined to quarrel with his daughter-in-law, "you can hardly get the English view of family jewels, as they are unknown in America."

To this Theodora made no reply, and Lord Castlemaine felt himself a deeply injured man. Yet, his words were not without their effect, and as Fermor entered the room at that moment, Theodora said to him pleasantly:

"Do you think it would be in better taste if I should wear the family jewels to-morrow night at the ball?"

"I think perhaps it would be better," replied Fermor.

"Then," said Theodora, "as it really makes no difference to me, I will wear them. But I don't care in the least for them." Then she added with a demure smile: "As Lord Castlemaine says, tiaras are not really suited to the insignificant American figure and features," and Theodora actually laughed as she spoke.

Fermor was as much struck with the novelty of

Theodora's view as Lord Castlemaine himself was, but had greater indulgence for it.

On Monday the great political meeting in the market town was held. Theodora had followed, according to Fermor's wishes, the old-fashioned idea of attending the meeting with all the state of her position. The weather continued bright and balmy and the procession of carriages and motors made a brave appearance in the thronged streets of the quaint old town. Theodora drove in a splendid open landau, finely horsed. The Prime Minister sat by her side and Fermor opposite. Lord Castlemaine would have been very well pleased to have occupied the fourth seat, but was not invited to do so.

Theodora wore Fermor's colours, violet and white, and carried a great bouquet of purple and white violets. Her reception by the people was not altogether cordial. When she took her seat with the other ladies of the party on the platform of the town hall, she was loudly applauded from the section of the gallery which was filled with socialists come to boo, rather than to listen. This did not add to the warmth of her greeting. The Prime Minister spoke well and forcibly and was loudly cheered. Fermor followed him in an address which amazed and gratified his supporters. He was reckoned a man of ability, but his life until a few months before had been spent in a way not calculated to show or even develop his abilities. He proved himself to possess the power of thinking while standing on his feet, and

his address was convincing, strong and was arranged and delivered in a masterly manner.

The Prime Minister pricked up his ears. Here was a man who would undoubtedly develop that rare and valuable power of carrying a legislative assembly with him.

Theodora sat listening to her husband, the colour stealing into her delicate face. Her pride was gratified, her natural love of distinction pleased. When Fermor concluded, he was greeted with tremendous cheering, not only from the socialistic element which was a source of real weakness to him, but from all present. The Prime Minister shook hands with him amidst a roar of applause. Lord Castlemaine did the same, and there was some laughter and booing.

Then the party left the platform, Theodora escorted by the Prime Minister, and made their way through the cheering crowd to the equipages. Theodora was greeted far more warmly than when she arrived, and bowed right and left, smiling her thanks. The same cheers accompanied them as they drove back through the town. Once in the country roadway, the Prime Minister said earnestly to Fermor:

"Believe me, my congratulations were sincere. Much as I expected of you, I may say that you have really surprised me," and then turning to Theodora he asked, smiling, "Can you not say the same to Lord Fermor?"

"No," replied Theodora; "nothing Lord Fermor

can do in the way of acquitting himself well, can ever surprise me."

The Prime Minister thought this a very pretty speech, but he was of the opinion that a steady-going Englishwoman would have been better, politically, for Fermor than this charming American who seemed to go instinctively the wrong way.

That night there was a splendid ball at King's Lyndon. It was a very general affair, meant as the introduction of the Fermors once more as social and political factors in that division of Midlandshire.

The ball had a distinctly political complexion and embraced not only persons of the highest rank, but extended to many who had never before received an invitation to a great house. The only certainty about a ball is the amount of the cost; its success appears to be governed by inscrutable forces. The King's Lyndon ball was from the beginning a splendid success. In addition to the magnificent suite of rooms, fine music, a gorgeous supper and a large and distinguished attendance, dancing went with a swing, and the spirit of gaiety prevailed. The host and hostess received with the utmost cordiality. Theodora had carefully studied the *personnel* of the ball, and managed to have something appropriate to say, with her natural grace, to every person present.

An American woman in such a position was a novelty to nine-tenths of those present. They were all conscious of the difference in dress, looks, man-

ner, accent and power between the American and the Englishwoman, but there was no doubt of Theodora's capacity to please. She wore the Castlemaine tiara and necklace and made Fermor laugh by saying resignedly:

"I don't look so badly in them, after all."

Jack Thornycroft and Wyndham were indefatigable in dancing and also in providing partners for girls to whom a partner was a delightful rarity. Dot Wyndham bore herself like a young duchess. If there were any heavy hearts that night, they were cleverly disguised. Such was the case with Lady Fermor, whose heart, under her laces and jewels, sometimes had a painful throb while she smiled and said graceful things to the people surrounding her. The thought of the old man lying in the tower room and watched by Reyburn, haunted the daughter's heart.

The ball was not over until five o'clock in the morning. When the house was finally quiet, the dawn was at hand.

After luncheon, on that day, the guests all left except Lord Castlemaine. The Prime Minister, on making his farewell, said with much sincerity that he had enjoyed his visit. His secret comment was that it had been a little different from most visits, and he wondered how much Fermor's marriage would profit him personally and politically.

Four persons had found happiness at King's Lyndon on those Easter days—Jane Battle and Wynd-

ham, and Jack Thornycroft and Dot Wyndham. Jane, with the promptness of an English girl in telling of an offer of marriage, slipped into Theodora's boudoir before breakfast on the morning the party broke up, and confided joyfully that Wyndham had told her something she knew already—that he loved her.

"I don't know what papa and mamma will say," she added, "but Mr. Wyndham says he doesn't care and that papa may keep my money if he likes."

Jack Thornycroft only had a moment, before luncheon, to tell his tale of joy.

"There's luck in cold numbers," he said to Theodora in a corner of the terrace, with many persons in sight. "It's the fifth time I've asked her, and at last she consented. But on such terms! By Jove, Lady Fermor, you'll hardly believe it, but the engagement is to be kept a dead secret, and I am to cross the Atlantic to fetch her. When I said, as she was already on this side, the wedding might as well take place here, I thought she was going to murder me or at least throw me over, so I hastened to back down. She says she must be at perfect liberty to deny that any engagement exists! That seems positively immoral to me, but I yielded that point too, just as I have yielded every other."

Much to Jack's amazement, Theodora took all these things as a matter of course, and declined to be surprised at anything.

When the guests were all gone, Theodora went

upstairs for a quiet hour with her father. Seymour was up and dressed and in much the same state he had been for some days—perfectly quiet and generally rational, but showing frequent lapses of memory. It was nearly four o'clock when Theodora went downstairs and out for a walk. Fermor was hard at work in his study, and Theodora was not sorry for an hour or two to herself after the excitement of the last few days.

She walked through the yew alley to the ornamental water, and followed the path around the lake. The spring sun was on its descent and already the shadows were growing long, and the birds that nested in the temple at the head of the lake were flying about the eaves. Theodora seated herself on a bench to enjoy the repose of the afternoon. In another moment she heard a firm step, and Lord Castlemaine's tall figure approached and he seated himself by her side. There could be no question that Lady Fermor and her father-in-law were at feud, although Theodora maintained her defensive attitude with smiling grace, and Lord Castlemaine could not forget he was at war with a charming woman. He knew very well that the strongest weapon Theodora had was the fact that it was through Seymour's money King's Lyndon had been acquired and restored, and this weapon was one she could not use.

"I am glad that you are alone," said Lord Castlemaine in his blandest manner, "as I think the time has come for plain speaking. The presence of your

father at luncheon day before yesterday was nothing more nor less than a catastrophe. You can't ask people to meet and sit at the same table with a man who has done time in prison. That is the simple truth and you should know it. You must keep your father at a safe distance and avoid having anything to do with him outwardly, or you will ruin Fermor."

Lord Castlemaine expected Theodora to show anger at his words. He was hardly prepared, however, for the hot indignation which blazed from her eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried, rising to her feet, and then stopped short. Lord Castlemaine rose too. He had at last made her throw away her buckler of calmness. She was trembling with excitement, and Lord Castlemaine followed up his advantage.

"Of course, as regards your religion," he said, "I don't give a damn for anybody's bigotries, but it's harming Fermor. The local newspaper on Saturday had a silly but very mischievous editorial about Fermor turning Romanist, and next day it was followed by an article which plainly pointed to Seymour as an escaped convict. But there is something else. You may have children. Normally, I would wish for an heir to this place." Lord Castlemaine waved his hand around at the verdant gardens, the rich park, the splendid mansion lying fair and still in the afternoon glow.

"But the heir to all this will have a taint in his blood. If your Fontarini child had lived, he might

have proved another Pietro Fontarini. It is likely that a child with the characteristics of your father will inherit this place. For my part, I am not unduly particular, but the thought of your children and the blood they will inherit is not very pleasant to me."

As Lord Castlemaine stopped speaking, he thought Theodora was about to faint, so quickly did she grow pale and sink, rather than sit, upon the bench. The words seemed etched in fire upon her brain. She had known the agony of looking into the innocent eyes of a child and wondering if the soul of a felon would develop in that child. Lord Castlemaine, having done the mischief, felt a kind of pity for her as she sat, pale and trembling and wild-eyed. But this was not a question to be settled by an impulse of pity. He cared little for Fermor's political future, but he hated getting into the newspapers, and he had a real and intense family pride, which made all he said to Theodora on the subject of the future heir of King's Lyndon, have the force of sincerity.

"Now," he said, sitting down by her, "you think me your enemy, but I am not. I know that you are in love with Fermor and Fermor is in love with you, but what is called love, is, in my opinion, merely a phase. It sounds well enough in poetry and sometimes has an historic aspect in history. But it means nothing. I never allowed any woman to get a hold on me. Fermor allowed a painted Jezebel,

the Bellenden woman, to get a very strong hold on his purse, but I don't think she every had any on his heart. You women never believe these things. You will always cling to that superstition of love. You are going mighty near to ruining Fermor with your quixotism about your father and your religious fervour and sacramental marriage and all that."

It was some minutes before Theodora spoke. Then she said in a low voice:

"I thought, after Pietro Fontarini died, that I should never again have any man to insult me. You have insulted me grossly."

"And you will damage Fermor still more by ordering me off the premises," replied Lord Castlemaine with cheerful good humour.

"I certainly shall," replied Theodora, "unless you make me an apology and agree not to repeat the offence."

Lord Castlemaine looked at her, his wide, handsome mouth coming open in a broad grin. His eyes were still fine in spite of their leer, his figure still imposing in spite of hard living, hard drinking and hard working.

"I daresay I have offended a huge lot of people in the course of a long and ill-spent life," he said, "and apologies have often been demanded of me, but no one ever secured one out of me yet. However, in this case, considering you are my daughter-in-law and remarkably attractive and very determined and I never know what you are going to do

next in your highly original and American way of managing things, I will apologise. There! I ask your pardon and agree not to mention the subject again, because I know you will not forget what I have already said."

Lord Castlemaine walked away half laughing, leaving Theodora still sitting on the bench. Despair seized her. Was she destined to bring misfortune on all whom she loved, and if children were given her, were they to carry the taint with them? She earnestly longed and hoped and prayed for children, but she recalled now that strange and secret feeling which made itself felt in the agony of her grief for her child, that at least there could be no repetition of Pietro Fontarini. But from the storm of emotion, one thought arose serene. She could never abandon her father.

Faithfulness and devotion were not only a part of her nature. They were her nature. She recalled the words of Cardinal Fontarini and of Ashburton, men of the highest ideals and clearest outlook, and they had sustained her. While these thoughts were passing through her mind, she heard Fermor calling her name.

"Here I am," answered Theodora, rising and going toward him. They came together in the very spot where they had first met as betrothed six months before. Theodora's pallor and agitation were plain to Fermor, and he took her hand, saying:

"What has happened?"

Theodora's other hand closed over Fermor's.

"I wonder," she said, "if after all, that I have done you terrible injury by marrying you, and will continue to do so as long as I live? I would rather die than do you an injury. But when I am asked to give up my father—can't you understand that I *can't* give up the best father that any child has ever had, the kindest heart, the most generous man!" She stopped, and began to weep silently.

"I have not asked you to give him up, Theodora," replied Fermor gently. "It is not in you to do it, that I know very well. I will help you to bear this. It would be idle to deny that the story will injure us both; but we have both profited by your father's generosity; so we must stand by him."

Theodora's tearful face was uplifted, with a sad smile, to Fermor's.

"At last," she said, "I have found in you a man who knows the meaning of honour."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### Triumphant Democracy

It is not to be supposed that Lady Susan Battle remained quiescent while the newspapers were full of paragraphs containing thinly veiled allusions to Lord Fermor, to the tragedy in Seymour's life and to the dangers of socialist influence on the one hand, and Catholicism on the other. Lady Susan presently announced to Lord Castlemaine her determination to go down to King's Lyndon and demand that Theodora cease all intercourse with her father. Lord Castlemaine promptly forbade it and called her a presumptuous idiot.

"I got worsted in my encounter with Lady Fermor, and she would do you up in spite of your purple velvet gowns and largest brooch and longest feathers," he answered.

This conversation took place in Lady Susan's own drawing-room and in the presence of Joshua Battle, who rarely opened his mouth in his own house or anywhere else. It was before luncheon and Lady Susan had not yet read the morning newspaper. Mr. Battle silently handed it to Lord Castlemaine, who read in a sonorous voice the announcement of the engagement of Captain John Thornycroft of Croft Castle,

Lincolnshire and the Havens, Kent, to Dorothy, only daughter of the late Wescott Wyndham of New York. The wedding was to take place during the summer.

The blow was severe to Lady Susan.

"I consider," she said, after the first shock of surprise, "that Jack Thornycroft behaved shamefully to Jane. It was just what I should expect of him—to marry that sensational person, who, I understand, is only nineteen and dresses like a dowager duchess."

"Better than any dowager duchess I know," replied Lord Castlemaine, who had never investigated the subject. "My own belief is, that you will still be connected with Jack Thornycroft, because Wyndham, I can see, is dead set on marrying Jane."

At that moment, just as if it had been prearranged, the door opened, and the footman announced "Mr. Wyndham."

Wyndham entered, smiling and debonair as usual, and was received timidly by Mr. Battle, icily by Lady Susan and with every demonstration of cordiality by Lord Castlemaine, who had a very clear notion of the object of Wyndham's visit. When they were again seated, Wyndham said, smiling to Mr. Battle and glancing at Lady Susan:

"I suppose I may as well make a clean breast of it. I came at this informal hour, Mr. Battle, to ask your consent and Lady Susan's to my marriage to your daughter Jane."

Joshua Battle, true to the instinct of self-preservation, remained silent, and Lady Susan spoke with chilling politeness.

"We regret very much to hear of this, as we think such a marriage undesirable, and in fact quite out of the question."

"Why?" innocently asked Wyndham.

Mr. Battle glanced helplessly at Lady Susan, who answered promptly:

"It is not necessary for us to state our objections."

"I think it is," said Wyndham, earnestly. "I didn't expect you to accept my proposition without making any inquiry into my character, my standing, my antecedents, and my ability to maintain your daughter as she is accustomed to be maintained. I am supplied with all those particulars, and can refer you, besides, to the American Ambassador."

"That is unnecessary," replied Lady Susan, after a freezing pause.

"As regards fortune," persisted Wyndham, "I can furnish a list of banks and trust companies which will prove that I can give your daughter everything pertaining to her station. I am willing to settle everything I have on her, and to insure my life for her benefit for any amount Mr. Battle thinks necessary. Her own fortune will, of course, be secured to her."

Lady Susan looked significantly at Joshua Battle. These quixotic offers, as she considered them, plainly

marked Wyndham as an unprincipled adventurer. She repeated, therefore, with stern emphasis:

"I can only say that Mr. Battle and I cannot consider your proposition."

"That's all right," replied Wyndham cheerfully. "I am awfully sorry not to have your consent and Mr. Battle's, and I'm sure it will distress Miss Battle very much, but we shall get married all the same."

All through this, Lord Castlemaine sat silent, and enjoyed himself more than he had done even at Monte Carlo. He had no love for Americans, but his sense of humour placed him irresistibly on Wyndham's side. Besides, a girl like Jane Battle, of no descent, and no particular beauty or distinction, with only her ten thousand pounds to her fortune, was quite good enough for an American. Lord Castlemaine was too much of an artist to spoil the scene by speaking. He merely sat back and chuckled softly.

Suddenly, as if by a prearranged scheme, Jane walked in from the next room. Wyndham rose and saluted her gallantly.

"I think," he said, "it is all settled. Your father and mother have refused their consent, but they will probably come round in the end."

"I hope so," replied Jane, a firm note in her sweet voice.

"And in cases like this," continued Wyndham, "the sooner we are married the better."

"I suppose so," said Jane softly.

Lady Susan, dazed and dumbfounded by what was happening so rapidly, concluded that Wyndham had been drinking, and that Jane was crazy, but she managed to cry out to Wyndham:

"How dare you have the presumption to ask an English girl of my step-daughter's position and fortune to marry you?"

"Well," answered Wyndham, "you see, I had lots of provocation to fall in love with Miss Battle. It's all her fault to be so fascinating. Some people don't think English girls attractive, but I do, I can tell you. Miss Battle did me up in about three days."

"Mr. Battle," said Lady Susan in an awful voice, "please to ring the bell."

Joshua Battle obediently got up and rang the bell and returned to his seat. Then Lady Susan said sternly:

"Jane, leave the room."

But Jane did not leave the room. Wyndham went over to her, took her hand and said, looking Lady Susan squarely in the eye:

"This is a perfect outrage. Miss Battle is twenty-three years of age, and to be ordered out of the room like a child is preposterous."

The footman having appeared, Lady Susan said:

"Show Mr. Wyndham out."

"Certainly," replied Wyndham coolly, "but when I go, Miss Battle goes with me. My sister is waiting in the motor outside. Miss Battle can remain

with her until I can arrange for our marriage to-morrow morning. Do you think I would leave the woman I love in a house where at twenty-three years of age, she can be ordered about like a servant?"

Wyndham held out his hand to Jane, who calmly put hers within it.

"I hardly think," said Jane tremulously, "that mamma means to be unkind. In England, mothers often send their grown daughters out of the room."

"You bet they don't in America," replied Wyndham warmly, "and I don't intend to stand by and see the girl I love treated in any such manner. More than that, I could not respect a woman who allowed herself to be coerced in this manner. So, Jane, it is up to you now to take me or leave me on the spot."

"Most interesting crisis at which I ever assisted," murmured Lord Castlemaine, unable to restrain his enjoyment longer.

Tears came into Jane's pretty eyes. She glanced at Lady Susan, who was boiling with wrath, and then Jane looked at Wyndham.

"Dear mamma," she said, putting her hand in Wyndham's, "I know you don't mean to be unkind. It is only that Mr. Wyndham is not accustomed to English ways. But I love him and mean to marry him, and I must do what he says."

For the first time since Joshua Battle married an earl's daughter, he spoke for himself.

"My dear Jane," he said feebly, "you must see the scandalous nature of what you are contemplat-

ing. To leave my house with this young man would be to blast your reputation forever."

Wyndham's dark, handsome face was red with anger as, still holding Jane by the hand, he walked up to Mr. Battle and said with concentrated rage:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to use such words in connection with your daughter. If you were not an old man, I would kick you full of holes this minute. Your daughter couldn't do anything that was not modest and proper—she would not know how. She couldn't be in any better company than with my sister. When she is my wife, I shall demand an apology from you for your language to her to-day, before I permit her to hold any communication with you."

If the dome of St. Paul's had suddenly collapsed, or the Nelson column had melted into thin air, Lady Susan and Mr. Battle could not have been more astounded. Lord Castlemaine, however, retained his composure and remarked with a cheerful grin:

"Susan, you are beaten all to rags, for the first time in your life. The girl is going with Wyndham and it would be making an awful row and you will have a harder time than ever in marrying off the other girls. You had better compromise."

"The only compromise I will accept," shouted Wyndham, now thoroughly incensed, "is to be married next week at St. George's, Hanover Square, with all the flummery that can be crowded into it. I hate a show wedding as much as any man, but the

only terms I will accept from Lady Susan and Mr. Battle is to have them give their daughter a wedding as if she were marrying the eldest son of a duke."

"That is what Susan has been after all the time," remarked Lord Castlemaine pleasantly. "She could have married these girls with their ten thousand pounds apiece, a dozen times over, but she wanted to make a great stroke, and she can't do it, particularly with the American competition. You may as well knock under, Susan."

"I will never consent," gasped Lady Susan, feeling as if the ground were slipping from under her feet.

"All right," responded Wyndham, who saw the game in his own hands and who had recovered something of his good humour. "Get your hat, Jane, and you can send after your things. If they won't let you have them, it is no matter. You can get an outfit a good deal better perhaps."

"Pray, uncle," said Jane, more tears coming in her eyes, "persuade mamma and papa to consent and let me be married from home."

"There shouldn't be any occasion to persuade," said Lord Castlemaine. "People should learn to accept the inevitable."

Lady Susan turned her head helplessly from side to side. Lord Castlemaine, upon whom she relied to stem the tide of Americans, had gone over to the other side, whether from pure perversity or from

sincere conviction, she could not tell, but she was beginning to see that matters had passed out of her own hands.

"If my daughter *will* persist in this outrageous marriage——" she began.

"Stop!" cried Wyndham, "that word can't be used in connection with Miss Battle's marriage to anybody. You may say what you like about me, but if a disrespectful word is said about Miss Battle, there will be trouble!"

Lady Susan was quite pale. Joshua Battle sat limp and unresisting in his chair. Presently, Lady Susan spoke.

"The wedding, however, must be strictly simple and private."

"No!" answered Wyndham firmly, "it must be extremely conspicuous. St. George's, Hanover Square, ten bridesmaids, full choral service and a Bishop to perform the ceremony. I mean to have all that's coming to me. The motor is outside, Lady Susan, and it is now or never."

Here Joshua Battle interposed with a feeble hand.

"It would be impossible, Mr. Wyndham," he said, "to arrange for such a wedding as you describe, within a week."

"A fortnight, then," said Wyndham,

"This is Friday!" cried Lady Susan.

"And it has been an unlucky day for you," interjected Lord Castlemaine.

"To-morrow, two weeks, then," said Wyndham. "The announcement goes in the newspapers to-morrow morning."

He took out his note book and wrote out rapidly, "A marriage has been arranged and will take place shortly between Archibald Wyndham, Esquire, of New York, and Jane, eldest daughter of Mr. and Lady Susan Battle, of Queen's Gate and Brindley Place, Holmead, Cheshire."

"The game is up, Susan," said Lord Castlemaine.

"It will simply ruin the prospects of the other girls," replied Lady Susan with the accent of calm despair.

"No it won't," answered Lord Castlemaine. "Decent-looking girls, with ten thousand pounds each, can get married. If you will just get that notion of eldest sons of dukes and earls out of your head, these girls will do very well. You threw them at Fermor's head from the time they were out of the nursery, and I told you all the time it was perfectly useless."

"I only wished to do my duty by my husband's daughters," replied Lady Susan, bursting into tears of chagrin.

Jane, who had the best heart in the world and who saw that beneath Lady Susan's purple velvet gown and large turquoise brooch, was really a good heart, went up to her and kissed her.

"I know, mamma, you have tried to do a good part by all of us. We appreciate it, but I assure

you I would rather marry Mr. Wyndham than any man I ever saw. I don't care for rank. I want to be happy."

Lady Susan did not know whether she was dreaming or awake. She seemed to be in a sort of nightmare.

When Wyndham went off after shaking hands cordially with them all, Jane suggested that they must go that very afternoon and see about the wedding gown. Lady Susan nearly fainted. Nevertheless, she went. Two weeks was a fearfully short time to arrange for a wedding even in England, where marriage follows engagements rapidly.

Eventually, as Wyndham had stipulated for a show wedding and insisted upon every particular, the time was extended to three weeks. Bridesmaids had to be asked, and as Lady Susan insisted they should be girls of rank, a little time was necessary. Lord and Lady Fermor entered warmly into the plans for the wedding. It was arranged that after a short honeymoon, the bride and bridegroom should sail for New York with Dot. A fortnight later, Jack Thornycroft would follow, and the second wedding in the Wyndham family was to take place in New York.

Lady Susan, whose spirit was by no means wholly crushed, ventured to suggest to Dot that she was giving herself unnecessary airs in requiring Jack Thornycroft to follow her to America to be married. To this, Dot replied coolly:

"If he doesn't come after me, he can't get me, that's all."

This revolutionary sentiment shocked and disgusted Lady Susan. It would never have been uttered by one of her own brood of step-daughters, and they certainly were entitled to as much consideration as unknown and extraordinary young persons. But Lady Susan found out, as Lord Castlemaine and even Lord Fermor had, American women forced a recognition of their own sovereignty in all the crises of domestic life.

The marriage of Wyndham and Jane Battle was really a beautiful and brilliant wedding, and lighted by the glow of true affection. Lady Susan was slightly comforted by the thought that it was something to get a daughter married, anyhow, and bore herself with an air of dignified martyrdom. Dot, at the head of the bridesmaids, was the tallest, as well as the handsomest, of them, and had an air of imperial grace as she swept up the aisle. The men all justified Thornycroft. He was one of the great matches of the season, but he had fallen a prey, a captive, as so many other good matches do, to the bow and spear of this radiant Diana. The English girls sighed as they looked at Dot and wondered how she did it. She had not the splendid fortune of Lady Fermor and many other American women who made great marriages in England. None of these American girls rode or shot or were golf champions or were crack

tennis players or drove their own motors in motor races. They simply wore fetching clothes and sat and smiled at Englishmen, and were saucy to them, and the thing was done. It was distressing to Lady Susan that the Castlemaine family and connections should become a party to the aggrandisement of Americans, but she laid it all upon the guilty head of Edward VII.

"It is the King's doing," she declared solemnly to Lord Castlemaine, when the wedding reception was over. "I consider the King as fully responsible for this marriage as if he had directly commanded it. I only hope the day may not come when he will endure great remorse at the manner in which he has blasted the hopes of so many English mothers and daughters."

"You mean," replied Lord Castlemaine, "that you hope that day will come. But it never will. The only thing for you to do, Susan, is to stop praying for the King and royal family at the morning service."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### The Dawn

The spring passed and the summer was at hand. Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham had sailed away, Jack Thornycroft had followed and returned with his bride, and the London newspapers were full of the gowns and doings of the tall and beautiful Mrs. Jack Thornycroft. The same newspapers chronicled much concerning Lord and Lady Fermor.

The Fermors went up to London for a short season and opened Seymour's magnificent house in Queen's Gate. A man in the beginning of his parliamentary service usually remained in the background, but a circumstance connected with his own division advanced Fermor with more than usual rapidity. He possessed all of Lord Castlemaine's powers as a debater, with a degree of prudence and tact entirely at variance with Lord Castlemaine's recklessness and inconsistency. Fermor, who in his own interest spoke once during the session, made an extraordinary impression. The Opposition, seeing that they had to deal with a man likely to become formidable, made every effort to disconcert him, but Fermor defended himself with the address of a seasoned debater. Within ten minutes after Fermor's opening words, the Opposition benches began to fill

up, the Ministerialists soon followed and it was plain that they had acquired a man worth having. Lord Castlemaine's reputation for great abilities helped Fermor, but Fermor was his own best helper.

The speech was meant to be a brief one, but it became a running debate in which Fermor was allowed to win his spurs against half a dozen clever opponents, and it lasted much longer than was anticipated. When he took his seat, members crowded around him, congratulating him, and Fermor felt that glow which attends a man on his first success in the arena for which he had longed since his boyhood. In the ladies' gallery, Theodora, with a proudly beating heart, witnessed her husband's triumph.

When he went out of the House, he found Theodora waiting for him in an open carriage. It was about six o'clock on a lovely June evening and the pinnacles of the great pile of the Houses of Parliament were reflected in the river which ran, in the old Homeric phrase, wine-coloured under the glowing sun. It happened to be the anniversary of the meeting of Theodora and Fermor at the Prime Minister's reception, and Theodora, after congratulating Fermor warmly and tenderly on his parliamentary triumph, spoke of the date. It was indeed one of those every-day miracles that do not surprise merely because they happen so often, one of the familiar mysteries with which this singular life is encompassed. A year ago, they were each at the entrance of an

unknown Paradise. Theodora's heart, she thought, was in the grave of her dead child. She had looked so long in the faces of shame and sorrow that she thought she would never again recognise honour and peace. God Himself seemed to be estranged. Now, how great the magic change! Love, honour, happiness, peace of soul, were hers. There were disturbing elements in her life, such as the catastrophe of her father, but a woman secure in the fortress of honour and guarded by love need not be afraid. So, with Fermor—how kindly had Fate smiled upon him! That June day a year he had, it is true, made up his mind to cast off the shackles of sloth and the influence of an evil woman. But it was as if the first look into Theodora's spiritual face had waked the spell of regeneration which Ashburton's talk, under the sky of the June midnight, had only confirmed. But one does not get rid of the evil things in life all at once, any more than cutting off a noisome weed destroys it forever. As Fermor sat back in the carriage, admiring his wife's delicate beauty, and listening, with laughing deprecation at her anticipations of glory for him, another open carriage drove by them, going as they were, toward the Buckingham Gate entrance to the Park. In this carriage sat Mrs. Bellenden and her husband. Something in the mutual sullenness of their air gave them the appearance of jailer and prisoner. A transformation had occurred in the dull, honest English squire. Bellenden's easy, good-natured, handsome, stupid face was

sharply watchful. His eye, turned on his wife, was menacing. Nothing more contrary to his easy countrified habits could be imagined than this afternoon parade in the Park. Mrs. Bellenden, painted and powdered, looked ghastly in the clear and lovely light. She no longer affected the sensational mode of dress which once suited her spectacular beauty. A sombre gown, a middle-aged hat, made her paint and powder grotesque. As the carriages came abreast, a passing omnibus halted them both. Fermor raised his hat to Mrs. Bellenden. Instead of returning his bow, she glanced at her husband. Bellenden caught her wrist in his grasp, and looking Fermor full in the face, call out to the coachman:

"Drive on and get out of this infernal crowd."

Fermor's face flushed deeply. He had never made full confession to Theodora concerning Mrs. Bellenden, feeling it the part of a gentleman to save this woman such rags and remnants of reputation which might be hers. It was unnecessary then; Theodora's quick eye and nimble intelligence took in the whole scene at a glance. She knew enough of what had happened to interpret the rest. Her face, too, grew scarlet. Both remained silent. When they reached the Serpentine, Theodora asked Fermor to walk with her a little by the water. It was comparatively solitary there, and no one recognised them. After a while, Fermor spoke.

"I ask your forgiveness, Theodora, but never will

I have to ask it again. If only I had met you before!"

Theodora turned her dark and pensive eyes on her husband.

"I try to put the past out of my mind. Do you the same. After all, we only began to live when we met each other."

A haggard and wretched woman, sternly guarded by a jealous and furious man, saw, from a distance, Lord and Lady Fermor strolling like lovers by the water's edge, and watching the sinking sun, as the long lances of light upon the velvet grass grew longer and the ruby glow of the bright water changed to emerald and amethyst. It seemed to Fermor and Theodora as if every day opened to each a new chamber of treasures in the soul of the other.

The Fermors' season in London was short, but brilliant. Theodora's mind was easier than she had imagined it possible concerning her father. He was no worse in health, and apparently perfectly happy at Barleywood, under Reyburn's watchful and intelligent care. Seymour's mind was by no means free from lapses, but these lapses were unimportant and seemed to be growing less. The thing which Theodora dreaded most did not occur—that Seymour did not develop the design at which he had several times hinted, of returning to America and serving out the remaining three months of his sentence. Wyndham, on his return to America, sounded the authorities, and, informing them of Seymour's

blameless life and decaying intellect, received assurances that no effort would be made to disturb him in his last days. This gave great peace to Theodora and to Fermor. Theodora's method concerning her father worked admirably. She maintained the closest intercourse with him, but in no way forced him on any one else, not even Fermor. Fermor, however, showed the utmost kindness and consideration and whenever his work permitted went to Barleywood with Theodora. Ashburton proved, as ever, the best of friends, and frequently managed to spend a few hours with Seymour, to whom he had become sincerely attached.

As a reward for Fermor's kindness and complaisance, Theodora chose to consider that Lord Castlemaine had made her an ample apology, and treated him with perfect courtesy. Lord Castlemaine himself never could find it in his heart to be steadily angry with a charming woman, and assumed an attitude of good-humoured indulgence toward his daughter-in-law. Theodora readily and with dignity took her place among the great political hostesses, and her social career was distinguished by the same graceful individuality which marked everything she did. She abandoned the London fashion of asking a thousand persons to fill the space which would only comfortably accommodate five hundred; carefully she avoided the traditional London crush which consists of one tightly wedged stream of humanity, painfully toiling up a grand staircase and jammed against

another stream of people toiling painfully downward. Lord Castlemaine offered Castlemaine House as an adjunct to the Fermor's house, and Theodora electrified him by her American initiative, in proposing that a temporary archway be cut for the season between the drawing-room floors of the two houses.

"It can be closed, you know, when we leave town," she said.

Lord Castlemaine stared, roared and slapped his knee.

"Capital! capital!" he cried. "It will drive my sister Susan crazy!"

So, indeed, it almost did. Lady Susan would no more have suggested such a thing than she would have suggested cutting off Lord Castlemaine's ears and attaching them to her bonnet, or proposing that she should be chained to him for the rest of the season. However, as she painfully reflected, the earth and the fulness thereof belonged to the Americans, and she could only take refuge in predicting awful retribution on the King who had made such things possible.

A magnificent archway was therefore cut between the drawing-room floor of Castlemaine House and the Fermors' house, which was a part of Theodora's dowry. The result was a double suite of rooms so large that no such thing as a crush was possible. The very first of Theodora's evening parties showed the excellence of the scheme, and Lord Castlemaine, quick at recognising things, saw in it a remarkable

instance of the ingenious American mind, which is at once imaginative and practical.

At this first evening party the guests entered through the Fermor mansion, and departed by way of Castlemaine House. Lady Fermor, standing in the archway at the head of the stairs, which was embowered in palms and flowers, could see all her guests without the crowding and huddling which makes the hostess of a great London house an object of pity at a reception. The women's gowns were not wrecked nor were the men's toes trodden upon. This was a great gain and glory for Theodora. She was warmly congratulated by her old friends, the Marsacs and the Thornycrofts, but most of all, by Lord Castlemaine himself. Fermor's quiet gratification was delicious to Theodora. It looked as if it might be possible that, after all, Theodora would be a help instead of a hindrance to her husband in his public career.

In July, the Fermors returned to King's Lyndon. There had been a cessation of newspaper paragraphs about him and it would seem as if Theodora were gradually overcoming whatever disadvantages her father, her religion or her nationality might have been to Fermor.

## CHAPTER XXX

### In the Morning Glow

At King's Lyndon that autumn there were no splendid parties, as Theodora's health required complete repose. In all her after life, if she had been asked to name the happiest period, it would have been that quiet autumn and early winter. She had the mysterious hopes and joys of coming motherhood. The life of repose and quiet companionship with Fermor she liked above all things, and of which she knew her portion would, in view of Fermor's public life, be necessarily scanty. She saw only her few intimate friends, which were also Fermor's. When she went in the dawn of the sunny autumn morning to service in the little church, seven miles away, or when in the veiled brightness of the afternoon she stopped to go in and pray before the little altar where the sanctuary lamp swung, Fermor was always with her to take care of her.

What he felt or thought at this time she never asked, believing that what was passing in Fermor's soul was between that soul and the Maker of it. Fermor's heart and life belonged to Theodora, but she left his soul free, even from the encroachments of her love.

There was always much for both to do in the morn-

ings. In the afternoon if the sun shone, Theodora strolled around the lake and, sitting in the temple, would indulge her memory and her imagination. She was glad sometimes to be alone, so much had happened in the last year and a half; such vast change in her life, that she needed a little time to adjust herself to it. Two years before, she had been a broken-hearted creature who thought that life was over for her. She had not been able then to accept any religion, and rebelled against the thought that God was a merciful Father. Then quickly but quietly, as fate always moves, everything changed—she had consented to begin a new life in the great London house at her father's earnest entreaty, and it seemed as soon as she gave up her own will and tried to forget her griefs and injuries in living for others, that the sun had burst upon her life. She had found herself, to her surprise, a wife, and a happy one. Her religious doubts melted away and her mind was at peace. The storms and humiliations that had threatened the first days of her marriage, had vanished before the light. The dream of a new joy cast a golden glow upon her path. The only cloud in her sky was her father's condition. But at least he had lived to see her happiness, and it was better that he should fade gently out of life, as he was fading, than that he should live to suffer. If only he could last until she could lay her child in his arms—Theodora asked no more.

And this was granted her. In January her child

was born; a beautiful boy without a blemish from head to foot. Fermor had the Englishman's deep and intense satisfaction in the birth of an heir, and even Lord Castlemaine condescended to be pleased. Seymour's delight was pathetic, and when in the early March days Theodora could come to him once more bringing with her the beautiful man-child, Seymour seemed to have reached that point of peace and happiness to the old which points the way to the Door of the Other House.

In looking into the dark, intelligent eyes of her child, Theodora, to her profound joy, was able to drive from her mind the thought which had haunted her concerning her dead child—that he might inherit some evil, some weakness, from another strain of blood. Great as was her devotion to her father, she could not wish her child to be wholly like him; Seymour was too mild, too gentle, too much under the mastery of his affections, and Theodora felt, with the tender superstition of a woman, that her boy would have her father's goodness of heart, combined with Fermor's intellect and strength of character.

In the early spring, Seymour took to his invalid's chair and only left his bedroom for a sheltered place on the porch when the sun shone at mid-day.

One afternoon in April, Fermor accompanied Theodora upon her daily visit to Barleywood. With them was the child in the hands of his nurse. It was Reyburn's only grievance in life that it was not hers to attend the child wholly. But she felt that

Seymour would not much longer require her faithful ministrations, and then she would once more return to King's Lyndon.

The day was beautiful and bright and Seymour seemed suddenly to have had the wine of life poured into his shattered frame. His voice was strong, his eye clear and, what was most amazing, his memory seemed to have recovered its full force.

As they sat on the sunny porch after Reyburn had fondled the boy and the child had been taken away, Seymour turned suddenly to Fermor and said:

"When I am gone, I want you to take possession of a certain writing-desk of which I have given the key to Reyburn, and in it you will find a letter addressed to Theodora which you must give her. I desire you to take charge of it because I know that at that time my daughter's grief will be such that she may not be able to attend to this as promptly as I wish."

Fermor gave his promise, and Theodora, smiling and taking her father's hand, said:

"I think, dear papa, if you improve like this, it will be many long years before that letter reaches me."

Seymour looked at her with the peculiar and appealing expression of the eye which had always been his characteristic.

"I think I shall go soon," he said, "and remember this, that beyond leaving you and the boy and the kind friends like Lord Fermor, I have not the

least objection to taking the long journey. I feel as if the carriage were at the door and I should not keep it waiting."

During their whole visit not the slightest lapse of memory occurred on Seymour's part. He talked pleasantly with Fermor, fondled the boy tenderly, but his last words, his last kiss, were for Theodora.

After she had gone down the steps and was waving her hand to him, he suddenly rose from his invalid chair, which he had not left for many weeks, and walked feebly to the steps and held out his arms once more. Theodora ran and led him back to his chair and made him promise her that he would not attempt to leave it again without someone to assist him. Then, with an overflowing tenderness, she said goodbye to him.

That night at midnight a summons came for Theodora and Fermor—Seymour was dying.

It was but a short drive through the shadowy stretches of the park and along the white highroad to the small house at Barleywood. Dr. Rolfe met Theodora and Fermor at the door.

"You can go in," he said; "his mind is perfectly clear, but he will hardly last until the morning."

Fermor's arm helped Theodora up the stair. The shock of pain in the midst of her halcyon days had unnerved her. They found Seymour propped up in bed, his eye and mind as clear as ever in his life, but with the unmistakable look of the man who knows himself to be standing on the brink of the farther

world. Theodora had meant to be calm, but all at once her courage forsook her; she laid her head on her father's pillow, put her arms about him and burst into a passion of tears. Seymour smiled faintly. Neither the love of husband nor of child had made the least alteration in Theodora's devotion to him.

"You must be calm," he said feebly, "if you love me, because I have something to tell you. Something only for you and Lord Fermor to hear."

Reyburn with instinctive delicacy quietly left the room and closed the door. When she was gone, Seymour said in a voice, weak and often faltering, but perfectly intelligible:

"It is something that a stronger man would have told you long ago, but I am not a strong man—I never was. I was too afraid of losing even the least atom of your affection——" Seymour stopped, as if gathering strength to continue, and Theodora, like a true daughter, said:

"Dear, dear papa, wait until morning to tell me what you wish me to know."

"I shall not be here in the morning," replied Seymour calmly. Whether he were a strong man or not, he faced death as coolly as any hero might. Then he continued:

"Theodora, you think perhaps, because you have a child, that no one can love a child so well as its father and mother. That is not true. No father ever loved a child more dearly than I love you, and yet—and yet—it is not a blood tie between us."

Theodora drew back, startled into calmness. Neither she nor Fermor, standing beside her, doubted that Seymour was perfectly himself; his eye, that unmistakable witness, had a clearness of intelligence that confirmed his words. Seymour continued, stopping often, but never losing the thread of thought or speech.

"I have not the strength to tell you all—you will find it in the letter in my desk, and all the proofs are with it. Your father is the man I killed by the only blow I ever struck in anger in my life. I found out that he had a child—you, my Theodora. He was estranged from his family, and my blow left his child a friendless and helpless orphan. I swore to devote my life to that child, and in this hour I can call God to witness that I have done it. I have done it."

Seymour's eyes were fixed on Theodora's face—it was as if he invoked God's justice and mercy for himself as he spoke.

Theodora drew back with a sudden start. Seymour seemed to think it meant repulsion.

"Perhaps it might have been better managed," he said humbly, struggling with an ever-increasing weakness. "Perhaps it would have been better if you had never been known as my child—but—Theodora—I loved you so well I had not the strength when you called me father—you had never known your own father."

Seymour made a faint motion to dry the tears

that were dropping on his face, but the weakness of death was upon him. Theodora could only throw herself upon her knees by him, and wiping his eyes with her handkerchief, put her arms about him and cry:

"My father! My dear, dear father!"

A smile shone upon Seymour's face, which seemed glorified with a perfect peace.

Then his eyes suddenly lost their look of intelligence and concentration. His mind, nerved for the last effort, finally lost its way and wandered amid the deeps and shallows that lead into the unknown and uncharted seas. After a moment or two of distress, he suddenly said to Theodora, in a strong and pleasant voice:

"I will not say good-night, my dear, as I want to see you dressed in your white gown for the ball, before I sleep. I always sleep better for seeing you the last thing——"

And the soul of Seymour, all weakness and all strength, all human and pitiful and loving, passed to its account before that merciful God to whom he had ever offered the sacrifice of a contrite and humble heart.

. . . . .

When Theodora and Fermor reached King's Lyndon, and stood alone together on the terrace, it was that mysterious hour which is neither night nor day, neither darkness nor light. A melancholy moon hung low in a haggard sky; the stars had flickered

out, and the dark earth, plunging through the black abyss of space, breathlessly awaited the miracle of the dawning.

"Let us not go in yet," said Theodora. She looked so wan and sad that Fermor was alarmed for her, and replied:

"Do you not wish to see the child?"

"'No," she said, "you are enough for me now."

Fermor put his arm about her with a new and deeper rapture. Neither the child in his rosy sleep, nor the dead man, lying in the meekness of death, nor the influence of any mind or soul could come between him and Theodora. Suddenly she began to weep silently. "I know," she said, "it is a relief to you that our child is not—has not——" She stopped, and Fermor understood what she meant. There was no taint in the blood of their child.

"But he was my father," she cried. "I was the child of his soul, if not his blood." Then she grew composed, and her pale, distressed face became illumined; her colour returned, her eyes resumed their gentle stare with a soft splendour.

"And I shall see my father again," she said. "Now, I know for the first time what it is to believe, to trust, to hope all things. Look! Look! See the sunrise!"

At that moment the sky was suddenly flooded with opaline light. The wind of dawning rushed from the far spaces of the sun and brought with it a golden glory, a crimson splendour, that enveloped the

earth. From the border of the lake that gleamed with light, rose a lark, singing rapturously. It was quickly lost to sight in the blue sky, but its song floated downward like the trickling of a fountain. The ecstasy of the morning penetrated the hearts of Theodora and Fermor. All things proclaimed, not death, but immortal life.

THE END

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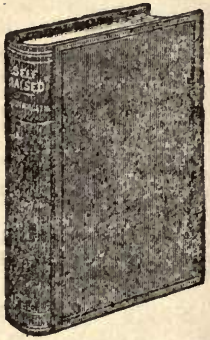

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